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The Young Proust and the Visual Arts:

Vision, Perception, Aesthetics

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Declaration

I declare that this thesis was composed by myself, that the work contained herein is my own except where explicitly stated otherwise in the text, and that this work has not been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification except as specified.

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Abstract

This thesis explores the relationship between the early writings of Marcel Proust and the visual arts through a phenomenological approach drawing on Merleau-Ponty's theory of perception. Proust's juvenilia are studied in four chapters with regard to respectively four genres of painting: genre scenes and still lives, in particular by Rembrandt, Vermeer, and Chardin; garden scenes and landscapes of the botanical world as depicted in Ruskin, Monet, and the Pre-Raphaelites; seascapes and atmosphere depiction in Turner, Monet, and Whistler; portrait paintings by Rembrandt, Van Dyck, and Blanche. The thesis does not aim to trace any direct influences of these painters on Proust, but, rather seeks to identify aesthetic commonalities between Proust and these artists, with an emphasis on their similar visions and ways of perception. It will pay particular attention to the aspects of colour and light, as well as space and time, making use of the Merleau-Pontian theory that underlines a participatory mode of perception where the body integrated with the world occupies a pivotal position. The thesis addresses the uniqueness of the young Proust's vision as an apprentice stage, which allows us to identify early aesthetic tendencies that will be developed in *À la recherche du temps perdu*.

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Abbreviations

CSB Marcel Proust, *Contre Sainte-Beuve*, ed. by Pierre Clarac and Yves Sandre (Paris: Gallimard, 1971)

JS Marcel Proust, *Jean Santeuil*, ed. by Pierre Clarac and Yves Sandre (Paris: Gallimard, 1971)

MR Marcel Proust and Jérôme Prieur, *Le Mensuel retrouvé* (Paris: Busclats, 2012)

ŒE Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *L'Œil et l'esprit* (Paris: Gallimard, 1964)

PP Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phénoménologie de la perception* (Paris: Gallimard, 1945)

RTP Marcel Proust, *À la recherche du temps perdu*, 4 vols, ed. by Jean-Yves Tadié and others (Paris: Gallimard, 1987-9)

VI Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Le Visible et l'invisible*, ed. by Claude Lefort (Paris: Gallimard, 1964)

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Introduction

Proust has always been an inexhaustible reservoir for studies on literature and the visual arts. Not only does he have a comprehensive knowledge of history of art and allude to a large number of painters and paintings in his works, he also profoundly incorporates and assimilates art, and through producing paintings with words, develops a vision and aesthetics akin to the visual arts. Numerous studies on the role of the visual arts in Proust's *À la recherche du temps perdu* have enriched our understanding of the productive interface between literature and the visual arts in his mature work, yet, to date, there has been no detailed examination of Proust's vision in his early writings with a particular emphasis on visual art. With a phenomenological approach, this thesis aims to fill this gap in Proust Studies.

A considerable number of works that focus on the biographical investigation have laid the foundation for our examination of the relationship between Proust and the visual arts. Apart from earlier works like Juliette Monnin-Hornung's *Proust et la peinture*[1] and Maurice Chernowitz's *Proust and Painting*,[2] recent research presented in *Marcel Proust: l'Écriture et les arts*[3] edited by Jean-Yves Tadié and Eric Karpeles' *Paintings in Proust: A Visual Companion to in Search of Lost Time*[4] provide a

[1] Juliette Monnin-Hornung, *Proust et la peinture* (Geneva: Droz, 1951).

[2] Maurice Eugene Chernowitz, *Proust and Painting* (New York: International University Press, 1945).

[3] *Marcel Proust: L'Écriture et les arts*, ed. by Tadié, Jean-Yves and Florence Callu (Paris: Gallimard, 1999).

[4] Eric Karpeles, *Paintings in Proust: A Visual Companion to 'In Search of Lost Time'* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2008).

comprehensive historical overview and a thorough listing of the art works referenced in the *Recherche*. A significant contribution to this area of research has been made by Kazuyoshi Yoshikawa, the author of *Proust et l'art pictural*.[5] The work examines Proust's engagement with a diverse range of schools of painting, drawing on factual resources including Proust's visits to exhibitions and private collections, his contact with reproductions of art works and his presence at the *salons mondains*. Yoshikawa furthermore offers an in-depth textual analysis of the *Recherche* that investigates Proust's various ways of presenting paintings, both explicitly named pictures and hidden ones embedded in his writing. Similarly, the painting exhibition 'Proust et les peintres' from July 1st to November 4th, 1991 at the Musée des Chartres presented a comprehensive artistic biography of Proust, where a great number of works by artists closely involved with Proust's life and writing were included.

Keiichi Tsumori adopts a similar approach in his *Proust et le paysage* which centres on landscape depictions particularly on Proust's early works including *Jean Santeuil*.[6] Tsumori bases his research on biographical records of Proust's traveling experience as well as the expression of unique personal impressions in his fictional works, covering a range of natural environments and domestic gardens that evoke Proust's meditations on notions such as nature and sense of place. As Tsumori points out, the influence of Ruskin plays a crucial role in the young Proust's perception of landscape. The young Proust's admiration for the art critic, as Marion Schmid

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[5] Kazuyoshi Yoshikawa, *Proust et l'art pictural* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2010).

[6] Keiichi Tsumori, *Proust et le paysage: Des écrits de jeunesse à la 'Recherche du temps perdu'* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2014).

suggests, had verged on idolatry,[7] and his pilgrimages to the places that Ruskin comments on receive close attention in Tsumori's research. Apart from stylistic influences of other writers such as Flaubert, Nerval and France, according to Tsumori, Ruskin's preferences and judgements on the visual arts largely shape Proust's thoughts on landscape.

Scholars have also explored the role of the visual arts in Proust from an aesthetic perspective. An early foundation is laid by Emeric Fiser, whose *L'Esthétique de Marcel Proust* puts forward a discussion of the interior and the exterior perception, highlighting the process of spiritualisation closely related to the idea of art.[8] Fiser also foregrounds the role of the artist by analysing his/her social and spiritual personality and his/her mission in searching for the essence of life. Luc Fraisse's *L'Esthétique de Marcel Proust* further develops the aforementioned themes through a close analysis of the aesthetic ideas illustrated in Proust's works such as the idea of essence and the conflicting relationship between art and life.[9] He also comments on Proust's thoughts on the social persona of the artist, as well as the artist's working method such as the treatment of source material and model. In *La peinture ou les leçons esthétiques chez Marcel Proust*, Yae-Jin Yoo traces the aesthetic influence of Ruskin on Proust, with an emphasis on the former's conception of nature and imitation.[10] Apart from the analysis of the characters

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[7] Marion Schmid, *Proust dans la décadence* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2008), p. 103.

[8] Emeric Fiser, *L'Esthétique de Marcel Proust* (Geneva: Slatkine, 1933).

[9] Luc Fraisse, *L'Esthétique de Marcel Proust* (Paris: SEDES, 1995).

[10] Yae-Jin Yoo, *La Peinture ou les leçons esthétiques chez Marcel Proust* (New York: Peter Lang, 2012).

related to art in the *Recherche*, Yoo underlines the phenomenological tendency in Proust's Impressionistic style of writing. Milton Hindus in *The Proustian Vision* also comments broadly on the creativity of Proust as a writer and his understanding of artists and art in general, such as originality, art simile, the role of tradition, time-worn objects, the value of suffering and the effect of habit.[11]

The psychoanalytic approach offers another dimension of interpretation to Proust Studies on the visual arts. In *The Mottled Screen: Reading Proust Visually*, Mieke Bal examines the perceptive feature of flatness in Proust, and puts forward a reading that interweaves the domains of knowledge and sensual desire.[12] In the chapter 'Chardin reads Proust', Bal innovatively demonstrates how the appreciation of an artist's work is enriched by new insights from the philosophy of Proust. Thomas Baldwin in his 'Proust's Picture Plane' in *Proust and the Visual*[13] analyses the 'quasi-pictures' presented in Proust's writing, linking the impenetrability of bordering space and the recurring quality of the two-dimensional picture surface in Proust's ekphrasis with the protective force of the conscious. Furthermore, *Le Petit pan de mur jaune: sur Proust* by Philip Boyer investigates the messages behind specific colour compositions and numbers in fine art and comments on Proust's ideas on painters such as Jean-Baptiste Camille Corot, Hubert Robert and Joseph Mallord William

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[11] Milton Hindus, *The Proustian Vision* (London: Southern Illinois University Press, 1967).

[12] Mieke Bal, *The Mottled Screen: Reading Proust Visually*, trans. by Anna-Louise Milne (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997).

[13] Thomas Baldwin, 'Proust's Picture Plane', in *Proust and the Visual*, ed. by Nathalie Aubert (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2013), pp. 131-48.

Turner.[14] He also provides a Freudian reading of artists like Johannes Vermeer in Proust's works in terms of desire and sexuality.

Phenomenological analysis of Proust's works has enjoyed a recent flourishing, which advances the investigation of his rich visual experience in Proust Studies. As a precursor in this area, Jean-Pierre Richard has contributed an important observation in *Proust et le monde sensible*, where various sources of sensory experiences in Proust's works, including descriptions and comments on art works, landscapes and fictional characters, are collected and analysed within a phenomenological framework, offering an overview of the phenomenality of Proust's writing.[15] Adopting a similar structure that covers the aspects of sensory qualities such as colour, depth and transparency, Anne Simon's *Proust ou le réel retrouvé* underlines the 'impression/surimpression' in Proust, based on its theoretical resonance with Merleau-Ponty and Deleuze.[16] In *Proust: la traduction du sensible*, Nathalie Aubert explores the notion of translation both as a practice and as a concept for creativity in Proust, emphasising the value of the untranslatable in language, invoking the Post-Structuralist notion of 'entre-deux', the ambiguity of which is comprehended as a reflection of the interpenetration of the body and the world, according to Merleau-Ponty's ideas on the relationship between the subject and the object.[17] The Merleau-Pontian interpretation that centres on the ambiguous character of the body, as

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[14] Phillippe Boyer, *Le Petit pan de mur jaune: sur Proust* (Paris: Seuil, 1987).

[15] Jean-Pierre Richard, *Proust et le monde sensible* (Paris: Seuil, 1974).

[16] Anne Simon, *Proust ou le réel retrouvé: Le Sensible et son expression dans 'À la recherche du temps perdu'* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2011).

[17] Nathalie Aubert, *Proust: La Traduction du sensible* (Oxford: Legenda, 2002).

Aubert suggests, liberates the understanding of Proust's text from a Platonic idealism and foregrounds the moments of suspension and hesitation, which are closely associated with the artist's gesture of creating a metaphor. Painting, therefore, as a pictorial 'entre-deux' in itself, occupies a crucial ground in Proust. A phenomenological analysis of the elements that constitute a tableau in Proust also underpins Taeko Uenishi's *Le Style de Proust et la peinture*.[18] Furthermore, in *Proust en couleur*, Davide Vago illustrates the influences of other writers on Proust's thoughts on colour, and provides an analysis of the phenomenality of colour in Proust's texts.[19]

In addition, there are other branches of research in the domain of Proust and the visual arts. For instance, Nayla Tamraz's study on portraits in Proust in *Proust Portrait Peinture* illuminates how paintings are textually presented in the *Recherche*.[20] Victor E. Graham's *The Imagery of Proust* focuses on the images being 'painted' by Proust.[21] Substantial biographical research on Proust's contact with the visual arts offers a solid and indispensable background for further investigations, whereas its lesser emphasis on the specificities of a vision and the working of the author's mind calls for aesthetic, psychoanalytic and phenomenological studies. Instead of thinking about art from the outside as in aesthetic studies or looking for social or religious connotations in the field of psychoanalysis, phenomenological

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[18] Taeko Uenishi, *Le Style de Proust et la peinture* (Paris: SEDES, 1988).

[19] Davide Vago, *Proust en couleur* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2015).

[20] Nayla Tamraz, *Proust Portrait Peinture* (Paris: Universités-Domaine Littéraire, 2010).

[21] Victor Ernest Graham, *The Imagery of Proust* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1966).

research focuses on the writing of a vision and scrutinises the Proustian gaze within the presentation of detailed sensory qualities. This thesis draws largely on the methodology of phenomenological examinations, particularly referencing the theories of Merleau-Ponty, while seeking to establish a clear link between Proust and the visual arts, which has not always been the object of previous phenomenological research on the experience of the senses in his writings.

The corpus of the research will be the writings of Proust before *À la recherche du temps perdu*. Specifically, the research will look into *Les plaisirs et les jours*, *Jean Santeuil*, and the articles published in journals which are collected in *Contre Sainte Beuve* and *Le mensuel retrouvé*. The writing of these works is sometimes judged as lacking maturity. Yoshikawa considers Proust's description of the kitchen scene in 'Chardin et Rembrandt' as '[banale] ou [schématisée]' as compared to a later improved version in the *Recherche*.[22] Also, Thanh-Vân Ton-That evaluates *Jean Santeuil* as an 'œuvre mal dégrossie'.[23] There are a number of comments and discussions on Proust's early works, such as *Les Plaisirs et les jours de Marcel Proust: Etude d'un Recueil* by Pierre Daum that offers a general overview of one early work of Proust's juvenilia focusing on character portrayal, theme and layout,[24] and *Proust avant la Recherche* by Thanh-Vân Ton-That that looks into the generic, narratological, and intertextual features of a wide range of different works of the young Proust, as well as the investigation into the socioliterary context of the

[22] Yoshikawa, *Proust et l'art pictural*, p. 263.

[23] Thanh-Vân Ton-That, *Proust avant la Recherche* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2012), p. 253.

[24] Pierre Daum, *Les Plaisirs et les jours de Marcel Proust: Étude d'un recueil* ([Paris]: Nizet, 1993).

early works of Proust by Frank Rosengarten in *The Writings of the Young Marcel Proust (1885-1900): An Ideological Critique*.[25] Concerning the Decadent Movement that influenced the young Proust, Marion Schmid analyses Proust's appropriation and reworking of Decadent themes and tropes in *Proust dans la Décadence*. Renée Kingcaidan in *Neurosis and Narrative: The Decadent Short Fiction of Proust, Lorrain, and Rachilde* presents a psychoanalytical reading of the elements of the Decadence in the neurotic state of the characters in Proust's early short stories.[26] However, systematic studies concerning these works have not yet been made in the domain that interrogates the interaction between literature and the visual arts. Though these works demonstrate a less mature style, they contain a considerable amount of sensory experience and thoughts on vision and other senses not incorporated into the *Recherche*. It is to be noted that while writing these works, Proust was in a stage of occupational uncertainty. Whether to be an art critic, a writer or a philosopher was still an open question for the young thinker, and such hesitation inevitably influenced his writing. As he confesses in the note before the preface in *Jean Santeuil*, the work is 'l'essence même de ma vie, recueillie sans y rien mêler', where the readers are likely to witness a less contrived way of narration, which is closer to Merleau-Ponty's primordial state of perception.[27]

The visual arts under discussion in this research, in terms of media, will

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[25] Frank Rosengarten, *The Writings of the Young Marcel Proust (1885-1900): An Ideological Critique* (New York: Peter Lang, 2001).

[26] Renée Kingcaid, *Neurosis and Narrative: The Decadent Short Fiction of Proust, Lorrain, and Rachilde* (Southern Illinois UP, 1992).

[27] *JS*, p. 181.

include oil paintings, watercolours, and drawings. Since the research sets its main target as the phenomenality of Proust's vision, visual art works of different media will serve as a supporting resource while not an end of our research inquiries per se. The overarching framework for analysis is borrowed from Merleau-Ponty, in particular *Phénoménologie de la perception*, *L'Œil et l'esprit*, and *Le Visible et l'invisible*.

As Anne Simon points out, the epoch when Proust wrote is also when Phenomenology was born.[28] Whether the two share a philosophical tendency is debateable, but the formulation of the latter, especially the thoughts of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, when employed in the interpretation of Proust' texts, are strikingly revealing. As Proust did in his literary works, Merleau-Ponty acknowledges the ontological significance of perception. In his investigations, perception is no longer the 'instrument' of knowledge as in Antiquity, nor the 'operation' of the body and spirit in the Classical period, but concerns the complex form of existence.[29] Instead of seeking the essence underneath the phenomenon like Bergson[30] and elevating art at the expense of existence as Schopenhauer,[31] the phenomenological approach is centred upon 'the realm of consciousness and subjectivity and its world of experience' through examining the phenomenon itself without a transcendental

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[28] Simon, *Proust ou le réel retrouvé*, p. 18.

[29] Gilbert Simondon, *Cours sur la perception (1964-1965)* (Paris: Editions de la transparence, 2006), p. 25.

[30] ibid., p. 80.

[31] *A Companion to Aesthetics*, ed. by David Cooper, Joseph Margolis, and Crispin Sartwell (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), p. 525.

anticipation.[32] In this, Merleau-Ponty's theory has drawn to a halt the long-standing opposition in Western philosophy between Epicureanism and Stoicism early in Greek philosophy and between Empiricists and Rationalists in the modern period. He refutes the Kantian notion of the extracted rules of relationships from objects and experience,[33] and denounces the perfect and absolute system of pure logic in Descartes, just as Proust who 's'écart[e] de la nudité du logos, pour tenter de préserver la chair de la phénoménalité'.[34] And for Merleau-Ponty, the Empiricist methodology, for instance, which illustrates the recognition of a face but could not explain the understanding of their expressions proves inadequate,[35] and the modern science with which he often engages is far from satisfactory in enlightening the existence of faith in a perception.[36] Merleau-Ponty arrives at the notion of the body from a phenomenological perspective, and as Aubert points out, he brings for the first time in the history of philosophy the 'statut ontologique du corps' to the centre of discussion.[37] Discarding the Cartesian separation of body-machine and spirit and situating the body as the primordial basis of perception, Merleau-Ponty proposes a world-view that resolves the dualistic debate that had lasted for centuries.[38]

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[32] *The Routledge Companion to Phenomenology* ed. by Sebastian Luft and Søren Overgaard (New York: Routledge, 2012), p. 2.

[33] *PP*, p. 348.

[34] Aubert, *Proust: La Traduction du sensible*, p. 2.

[35] *PP*, p. 32.

[36] ibid., p. 31.

[37] Nathalie Aubert, 'D'une parole à l'état naissant: Proust et Merleau-Ponty', *Romantic Review*, 91-1 (2000), 105-15 (p. 105).

[38] Claude Imbert, 'Maurice Merleau-Ponty', *Paragraph*, 34.2 (2011), 167-86, (p. 177).

The particularity of the body, according to Merleau-Ponty, consists in the fact that it is at the same time seeing and visible, touching and touchable, which enables it to bring the notions of outside and inside into an interlacing relationship.[39] Situated right at where the subject and the world encounter, the body is understood as the element with which the world is constructed and which actively constitutes perception,[40] just as the notion of subjectivity suggested in Proust's texts is considered by Erman as possessing 'un rôle organisateur'.[41] This dynamic of the perceptive process, if viewed specifically in vision, manifests itself as 'le regard […] [qui] enveloppe, palpe, épouse les choses visibles'.[42] And the process of perception is realised in the way that sensory qualities waken an echo in the body, 'parce qu'il leur fait accueil'.[43] Therefore, the traditional belief of 'une Unité absolue' proposed by Kantian philosophy is no longer valid,[44] for 'chacun de nous a un monde privé'.[45] To illustrate the experience with the world as opposed to Descartes' Cogito, the reason of being, according to Merleau-Ponty, is not 'ce que je pense, mais ce que je vis'.[46]

Based on the above ideas, principally in his *Phénoménologie de la perception* and *Le visible et l'invisible*, Merleau-Ponty builds a phenomenological structure of

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[39] *ŒE*, p. 18.

[40] *PP*, p. 16.

[41] Michel Erman, *L'Œil de Proust: Écriture et voyeurisme dans 'À la recherche du temps perdu'* (Paris: Nizet, 1988), p. 74.

[42] *VI*, p. 175.

[43] *ŒE*, p. 22.

[44] *PP*, p. 75.

[45] *VI*, p. 25.

[46] Ibid., p. xii.

perception, covering aspects such as colour, space, time, and synesthesia, which this thesis will adopt as the major framework of analysis for Proust's juvenilia. Within a Merleau-Pontian framework, the research seeks to answer the following questions: What aesthetic values from the realm of the visual arts are emphasised by Proust, and to what extent are painterly techniques and compositions assimilated and transferred into writing? As a number of artists' works are brought into the analysis of Proust's texts, what are the commonalities that can be discerned between the artists' experiments or preoccupations and Proust's own concerns with perception as regards colour, form, space and time? And what qualities of vision govern these phenomenological perceptions?

Unlike in influence studies, we will not reference specific art schools or artists as a determined source for Proust's writing and aesthetic, but, rather, we will draw attention to the conceptual commonalities as concerns certain methods and ways of looking in the visual arts. The overall structure of the thesis is laid out according to different genres of the visual arts, namely genre paintings and still lives, landscape paintings of gardens and forests, landscape paintings of sea and sky, and finally, portraits. Looking into the domestic scenes and objects commented in Proust's essays written on Jean-Baptiste-Siméon Chardin and Rembrandt Harmenszoon van Rijn and his descriptions of similar scenes in *Jean Santeuil*, the first chapter answers the questions: what effect is created by dim little light valued by Proust in genre paintings? What conception of time is shared by Proust and Johannes Vermeer in depicting a moment of stillness, and what spatial characteristics are discerned and utilised by Proust in the genre scenes? The chapter will trace the phenomenological

aspects of Proust's vision that echo the vision in the works of Chardin, Rembrandt and Vermeer, with illustrations from Merleau-Ponty's theories on light, time, space, formal and sensory interactions and artistic values.

What does Proust emphasise when the protagonist sees the colours of the plants in *Jean Santeuil*? Why are flowers or plants often regarded as human beings in Proust's early works? How does Proust see distance and marginal space in gardens and forests and what values are foregrounded for viewing paintings on a related theme? Chapter two will seek to answer these questions through an analysis of the botanical world in Proust's early writings, underlining his appreciation of the life and scenes of nature similarly seen in the attitudes and techniques manifested in the works by Impressionist painters, Ruskin, the Pre-Raphaelites, and others. The train of thought of the chapter will follow Merleau-Ponty's ideas on colours of different levels of multitude, the perception of form, the concept of eternity and movements in time, and the grasp of space through the body.

The subsequent chapter will explore the marine scenes and sky landscapes in Proust's early writings, including essays and novellas collected in *Les Plaisirs et les jours*, *Contre Sainte-Beuve*, and the unfinished novel *Jean Santeuil* with a look into the works of Turner, Claude Monet, and James Abbott McNeill Whistler. The general Merleau-Pontian concepts of the perception of colour, time, and space will again serve to amplify the understandings of specific phenomenological characteristics in Proust's painterly vision, such as the indistinctness of colour effect, immersive spatial perception, and movements of water and air.

The last chapter will focus on portraits 'painted' by Proust in *Les Plaisirs et les*

jours, *Contre Sainte-Beuve*, and *Jean Santeuil*, as well as his early essays published in the journal *Le Mensuel* concerned with exhibitions and salons of paintings by contemporary artists. The portraits painted by Rembrandt, Anthony van Dyck, and Proust's artist friend Jacques-Émile Blanche will also be brought into the discussion. Merleau-Ponty's ideas on time and aging, the perception of the manner of an individual, and the fluidity of identity will shed light on Proust's vision of human figures.

By offering a close look at one particular aspect of Proust's juvenilia, namely the relationship between his early writings and the visual arts, this thesis aims to enhance our understanding of this under-researched corpus of works and to offer insight into how Proust's emerging vision is metamorphosed into the later aesthetics of the *Recherche*. The thesis also seeks to make a contribution to Proust Studies by adding a new, complementary perspective to the existing research on the role of the visual arts in the *Recherche*. Finally, we aspire to shed new light on the artworks discussed in this thesis through the double prism of Proust and Merleau-Ponty.

Chapter 1

Genre Paintings and Still Lives:

Proust's Vision with Chardin, Rembrandt and Vermeer

This chapter will engage with genre paintings, defined in *The Oxford Companion to Art* as 'paintings depicting scenes of daily life, especially the type of subject matter favoured by Dutch 17th-c. artists', and represented here by the works of Rembrandt Harmenszoon van Rijn, Johannes Vermeer and Jean-Baptiste-Siméon Chardin, also with a discussion concerning the still lives of Chardin.[1] In his early years, Proust tried his hand at 'philosophie de l'art' as he states in a letter to Pierre Mainguetin, in the short essay named 'Chardin et Rembrandt',[2] through which he illustrates 'comment les grands peintres nous initient à la connaissance et à l'amour du monde extérieur'.[3] The article adopts a form of a Louvre tour guided by the narrator for a young man bored with ordinary life, in which the latter is led to appreciate the two masters' portraits and genre paintings, including *Saying Grace* (figure 7), *The Diligent Mother*, *The Buffet* (figure 9), *The Ray* (figure 10) by Chardin, and *Philosopher in Meditation* (figure 1) and *The Good Samaritan* by Rembrandt. Proust vividly describes the scenes and objects depicted in the art works and provides a reading of the dynamics within the pictures from an art critic's perspective and further demonstrates a way of seeing that he had

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[1] *The Oxford Companion to Art*, ed. by Harold Osborne (Oxford: Readers Union, 1975), p. 465.

[2] *CSB*, pp. 372-82.

[3] Ibid., p. 885.

acquired from these masters. Shortly after this article, in the unpublished novella *Jean Santeuil*, a similar aesthetic predilection is seen in his domestic depictions where the paintings of the aforementioned artists seem to undergo a literary transposition, or rather, as he writes, Proust adopts the vision of these artists and 'word paints' the scenes of domestic themes. In these 'word paintings' that often depict the interiors of a dining room, kitchen or bedroom, not only do the settings and human activities resonate with those genre paintings and still lives, but also the attention attributed to certain phenomenological qualities coincides with the techniques and styles of these painters. And although Vermeer's name is not mentioned in the early writings of Proust, the genre paintings of this artist in particular out of all the Dutch works of the same period, share much of the poetics and qualities with Proust's descriptions of the domestic scenes, which demonstrate, as Yoshikawa suggests, the genius of Vermeer that other critics like Thoré-Bürger failed to recognise.[4] The following analysis will foreground how Proust's vision in 'Chardin et Rembrandt' and *Jean Santeuil* echoes the visions of Rembrandt, Vermeer and Chardin, drawing on Merleau-Ponty's thoughts on perception, in particular as concerns light (the effect of chiaroscuro), time, space, and synesthesia, to reveal this commonality.

[4] Yoshikawa, *Proust et l'art pictural*, p. 82.

I Chiaroscuro

The atmospheric light effect is one of the most prominent features of Dutch genre painting in the seventeenth century, and chiaroscuro, almost a signature of Rembrandt, could not help but be an evident characteristic absorbed in Proust's writings. Chiaroscuro not only concerns the intensity of light, but also largely depends on the painter's treatment of colour and texture, which, according to Merleau-Ponty, are not separate qualities in an integral perception. The division between light and dark, the transparency of shadow, the solidity of reflection and the slow pace indicated by dim light are crucial qualities present in both Proust and the works of Rembrandt and Vermeer.

1.1 Division between light and dark

According to Merleau-Ponty, '[t]out est obscur quand on n'a pas pensé le négatif'.[5] The contrast between light and dark in the chiaroscuro effect serves as the utmost example of the two different surfaces required to illuminate the structure of 'éclairage-objet éclairé'.[6] In order to represent a brighter-lit object, normally a painter would not employ the brightest possible tone, but would rather portray 'les reflets et les ombres sur les objets de l'entourage'.[7] Proust, fully appreciating the opposing values of luminosity, frequently 'paints' scenes with such a dichotomy.

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[5] *VI*, p. 92.

[6] *PP*, p. 355.

[7] Ibid., p. 360.

In the preface of *Jean Santeuil*, after an afternoon of writing at the place of the lighthouse guard, the writer C attentively observes the dining couple in a simple room illuminated by a small furnace:

> La lumière du fourneau et d'une bougie n'éclairait pas toute la pièce, mais la clarté qu'elle y concentrait sur le mur était si paisible et si empreinte du calme de la vie dont elle éclairait chaque soir les scènes les plus tranquilles à l'heure où les travaux sont finis. (*JS*, p. 188)

Proust's depiction of the dining scene starts by showing the two light sources of the picture — the furnace and the candle, the capacity of which, far from that of the overwhelming daylight, only allows part of the room to be illuminated, leaving a portion of the scene in darker tones and rendering the parts receiving light in a 'paisible' effect, which indicates the use of a mild and warm yellowish colour. Such an effect can also be seen in the chapter of Jean's stay in Illiers where he lives with his uncle and cousin. Before the Sunday dinners, Jean waits in the ill-illuminated kitchen full of prospect, which is followed by the description of how the act of waiting for a beloved is embedded in every detail of a room:

> Et parfois, en semaine, avant cette heure-là, l'attente de celle qu'on aime par-dessus tout, qu'on connaît à peine et qu'on attend, pour laquelle on a fait sa chambre si belle et qu'on attend dans la lumière de la lampe, l'obscurité des coins, la porte parfois ouverte pour écouter, le feu souvent ranimé, les belles choses flatteuses sorties et disposées sur la cheminée. (*JS*, p. 353)

The lamp creates a similar effect to that of a furnace or a candle, leaving the corners dark, with the waiting figure of the protagonist settled in the light or in the dark area of the picture, patient and peaceful just as the dining couple settled at the table after a day's work. The poetics in Rembrandt's *Philosopher in Meditation* (figure 1) which was commented by Proust in 'Chardin et Rembrandt' (one of '*Les Deux*

Figure 1

Possibly Rembrandt Harmenszoon van Rijn (hereafter Rembrandt), *Philosopher in Meditation* or *Interior with Tobit and Anna*, 1632, wood, 28 x 34 cm, Musée du Louvre, Paris.

Philosophes' that Proust saw in the Louvre as Yoshikawa suggests), seems to undergo a subtle reincarnation in Proust's pictorial description.[8] The light from the window and the furnace, though not intense, produces a powerful yet tender brilliance, enhanced by the dark zones of the picture. Similar scenes in *Jean Santeuil* can also be found in Proust's account of the pleasant moments in Éteuilles. When Jean warms his feet in

[8] Yoshikawa, *Proust et l'art pictural*, pp. 96-97.

the room of the kitchen maid, the scene once again assumes the traits of a genre painting:

> C'était un de ces moments paisibles où les choses sont comme environnées de la beauté qu'il y a à être, où le charme est dans l'ombre qui emplit le fond de cette pièce où est le lit des petits enfants, dans la douce lumière qui blanchit le pied du lit, dans le tic-tac de la pendule, dans la figure, bien éclairée par la lampe, de la cuisinière qui bavarde, dans le fond mystérieux de la cuisine éclairée des rouges reflets de l'invisible brasier où se consomment les opérations délicieuses qui se révèlent seulement par le heurt d'une casserole fléchissant sous l'effondrement d'un charbon consumé ou le rare glouglou d'une friture bouillante qui glisse vivement dans la poêle. (*JS*, p. 320)

Among the charms of the peaceful moments enumerated by Proust, there are the gentle light of the lamp and the shadow in the kitchen maid's room, and the red reflections of the light given by the brazier on the floor of the kitchen. The distribution of light is carefully arranged by the author, with only a small portion of the picture being tenderly illuminated. Such an arrangement, apart from suggesting a difference that makes the distinction of luminosity possible in perception, opens up the limit of the perceptive range of colour for the whole picture. As Joshua Reynolds argues,

> by candlelight, not only objects appear more beautiful, but from their being in a greater breadth of light and shadow, as well as having a greater breadth and uniformity of colour, nature appears in a higher style, and even the flesh seems to take a higher and richer tone colour.[9]

Interestingly, Chardin's genre painting *The Philosopher* (figure 2) was compared to Rembrandt by a number of critics. Rosenberg considers the comparison as 'surprising' but notes that it 'can be probably explained by [...] the imposing volume and the half

[9] John Burnet, *Rembrandt and His Works: Comprising a Short Account of His Life* (London: Bogue, 1849), p. 50.

Figure 2

Jean-Baptiste Siméon Chardin, *Portrait of the Painter Joseph Aved* or *The Philosopher*, 1734, canvas, 138 x 105 cm, Musée du Louvre, Paris.

light'.[10] The half light in this painting is achieved through the brightness of the open book, the dark area of the lower part of the table and the philosopher's coat,

and above all, the upper body of the philosopher, which is positioned right in the dividing area, with half of his face lit by the light from the left, the other half dimly illuminated by the reflection of light from the page. The calmness of the scene and the

[10] Pierre Rosenberg, *Chardin* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), p. 212.

absorption of the philosopher seeking to find truth in chemistry (as indicated in the experimental instruments in the alcove), are not only similar to the moment depicted in Rembrandt's *Philosopher in Meditation* (figure 1), but also echo Proust's 'word paintings' in *Jean Santeuil* as discussed above.

When Proust brings two masters together in his short essay 'Chardin et Rembrandt', he comments on Rembrandt's *Philosopher in Meditation* (figure 1) and 'Le Bon Samaritain',[11] underlining the division of light and dark present in both works, the latter representing a scene where 'une figure dans [la] nuit déjà se dérobe au sourire d'une figure encore dans la lumière', and at the same time 'un même rayon, mettant la terre à l'unisson du ciel, faire vibrer à la fois, comme une corde tendue, une beauté mystérieuse dans le coteau lointain, dans le dos d'un cheval'.[12] Therefore, it is not only the notion of opposition in the chiaroscuro that interests Proust, but also the division that simultaneously separates and unifies different zones of the picture. For Proust, as Richard suggests, 'le désir n'aime rien mieux alors qu'interroger le trait-frontière, le plan de jonction et de séparation des deux régions lumineusement antinomiques', to the point that later in the *Recherche*, such division tends to a 'valeur de révélation', and the protagonist's incapability to sense it proves to be the death of one's sensibility.[13]

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[11] As Yoshikawa points out, the painting refers to *La Parabole du bon Samaritain* in the Louvre, now attributed to Constantin-Daniel van Renesse. *Proust et l'art pictural*, p. 97.

[12] *CSB*, p. 381.

[13] Richard, *Proust et le monde sensible*, pp. 51-52.

1.2 Transparency of shadows

Proust's predilection for the contrast between light and dark indicates an Rembrandtesque manner, or a vision common in other Dutch genre paintings of the seventeenth century. It is also worth noting that his description, in creating a sense of intimacy and tranquillity, differs from paintings from the Italian Renaissance that equally excel in chiaroscuro, such as the religious works of Leonardo da Vinci, Correggio and Caravaggio. One reason lies in the shared vision of Proust and Rembrandt that attends to the details of the darkness and shadow. In the previously cited paragraph of Jean warming his feet in the kitchen maid's room, the narrator observes that 'le charme est dans l'ombre qui emplit le fond de cette pièce où est le lit des petits enfants, dans la douce lumière qui blanchit le pied du lit'.[14] The shadow is never so dark that it renders objects invisible, but it is endowed with the similar tenderness of the light that articulates what is in the darkness in a more profound way. That is why according to Richard, the Proustian shadow, far from being the negation of day, is its 'envers', 'une dimension presque aussi active, aussi rayonnante que lui'.[15]

As can be seen in Rembrandt's *Philosopher in Meditation*, depictions of the wooden door behind the philosopher and the outlines of the bricks on the ground are accompanied with the transparency of the shadow, a common element in Rembrandt's works as John Burnet observes, who points out that the backgrounds in Rembrandt are often less dark than many Titians or Tintorets,[16] and the darks of his works are

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[14] *JS*, p. 320.

[15] Richard, *Proust et le monde sensible*, p. 51.

[16] Burnet, *Rembrandt and His Works*, p. 33.

finished 'with the greatest care and softness'[17] and are never allowed to be 'without a few touches of warm colour'.[18] This contributes to, what Bal defines as the essential Rembrandtesque manner in Proust, 'bringing out the other side of the chiaroscuro'.[19] Thus, the light enters a state of 'mobilism' with the darkness in the scene where,[20] according to Richard, it is 'successivement […] rompue et renaissante'.[21]

Figure 3

Johannes Vermeer, *A Woman Holding a Balance,* c. 1662-64, canvas, 42.5 x 38 cm, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.

[17] Ibid., p. 37.

[18] Ibid., p. 52.

[19] Bal, *The Mottled Screen*, p. 26.

[20] Ibid., p. 28.

[21] Richard, *Proust et le monde sensible*, p. 50.

Figure 4

Johannes Vermeer, *Lady Writing a Letter with her Maid*, c. 1670, canvas, 71.1 x 58.4 cm, Collection Sir Alfred Beit, Blessington, Ireland.

Figure 5

Johannes Vermeer, *Woman with a Pearl Necklace*, c. 1664, canvas, 55x 45 cm, Staatliche Museen Preussischer Kulturbesitz Gemäldegalerie, Berlin-Dahlem.

If one takes another look at the Delft genre painting characterised by 'an interest in light', for example, the works of Vermeer, the transparency of the shadow depicted in Proust's writing can also be observed.[22] In Vermeer's genre paintings respectively representing three girls engaged in their activity, holding a balance (figure 3), writing a letter (figure 4) or adjusting a necklace (figure 5) in front of a mirror, the walls are never depicted as fully lit, and the light that comes from the window is always partially blocked by the curtain and the wooden window frame. The long windows, which Yoshikawa observes as one of the principle features of Vermeer's genius, are made even demi-opaque, serving less as an entry of view to the outside world, and more as the source of a moderate light.[23] The soft and opaque effect of light and the transparency of the shadow resonate with the ambiguity of the relationships of light and dark in Rembrandt, which is possibly the aesthetic basis on which Proust later puts Rembrandt's name next to Vermeer's in the reflection on artistic styles in *Le Temps retrouvé*, where he comments that the worlds of the artist 'nous envoient encore leur rayon spécial'.[24] The light, both as a metaphor and as a phenomenological quality, explains Proust's appreciation and assimilation of the vision of the two artists.

Proust's relationship to the world, as Simon comments, comprises of 'une interdépendance entre recel et dispersion, fermeture et ouverture, ténèbres et lumière'.[25] And such a subtle rendering of the shadow common in Proust's 'word

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[22] *Masters of Seventeenth-Century Dutch Genre Painting*, ed. by Jane Iandola Watkins (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1984), p. xix.

[23] Yoshikawa, *Proust et l'art pictural*, p. 109.

[24] Ibid.

[25] Simon, *Proust ou le réel retrouvé*, p. 146.

paintings' of genre scenes could be a metaphorical illumination of these interrelated dichotomies, revealing a vision which opens itself to sense 'la visibilité de l'invisible'.[26] Instead of focusing on the field of the sensory world that is clear and distinct, Proust always seeks to summon and articulate those sensible yet not easily expressible details in the intermediary zone of ambiguity, with a vision similar to that of the two artists that addresses the objects in the transparent darkness.

1.3 Solidity of reflection

According to Merleau-Ponty, there are two ways of perceiving the reflection of light and reflection in general. One applies to the most common situation, where the reflection being seen from the 'coin de l'œil' is not the aim of perception, but only the auxiliary or mediator.[27] In the genre scenes 'painted' by Proust, some reflections of light could be observed as such a mediator in the vision that indirectly tends to something else, such as the 'rouges reflets de l'invisible brasier' on the kitchen floor at the house in Éteuilles.[28] The invisible fire is seen through the visible red reflection, which is the primitive mode for the general principle of transfer marked by Richard, suggesting a vision of the world where everything is integrally organised and dynamically connected.[29]

The other understanding of reflection originates from Merleau-Ponty's

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[26] Ibid., p. 147.

[27] *PP*, p. 357.

[28] *JS*, p. 320.

[29] Richard, *Proust et le monde sensible*, p. 64.

conception of lighting. In perception, the idea of light could be comprehended as an assumption which lies in the distinction between colours and luminosities.[30] However, colours and luminosities are not two concepts completely separated by fixed rules, and their difference only manifests itself in the engagement of our body in the structure of the world.[31] Light and shadow cease to be light and shadow when they become 'notre milieu' where we find something to see,[32] and furthermore, they are forms of colours neglected by psychologists, including 'le reflet, la couleur ardente, la couleur rayonnante',[33] which become evident when a painter 'clign[e] les yeux',[34] no longer seeing constant colours of certain objects under the variety of lighting.[35] In Proust, the second kind of vision that tends to the reflected light itself, summarised by Richard as the 'simple dépôt d'une tache de clarté, ou de couleur, sur une surface jusque-là inerte',[36] can be found in a certain number of scenes, for example, in the depiction of the guard's dining room where 'la lumière du fourneau et d'une bougie [se] concentrait sur le mur'.[37] The wall receives the light and gives it a certain texture, providing the eyes of Proust with a materialised object of contemplation.

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[30] *PP*, p. 359.

[31] Ibid., p. 362.

[32] Ibid., p. 358.

[33] Ibid., p. 353.

[34] Ibid., p. 354.

[35] Ibid., p. 358.

[36] Richard, *Proust et le monde sensible*, p. 63.

[37] *JS*, p. 188.

Figure 6

Signed Rembrandt, *Tobit and Anna Waiting for Their Son*, c. 1659, 40.3 x 54 cm, Museum Boymans-van Beuningen, Rotterdam.

Rembrandt's *Tobit and Anna Waiting for Their Son* (figure 6) is an excellent example of reflected light. Rough and dry brushstrokes produce a thin layer of uneven light reflection on the wall, giving the light a tangible yet glimmering existence, and thus the consumption of the wood in the furnace almost comes alive. As Gary Schwartz points out,

> [t]he rays of daylight in a closed space, [...] with normal weather, somewhat resemble the light of a fire or torch [...] our Rembrandt distinguished himself splendidly in reflections.[38]

[38] Gary Schwartz, *Rembrandt: His Life, His Paintings: A New Biography with All Accessible Paintings Illustrated in Colour* (New York: Viking, 1985), p. 323.

It is precisely in this Rembrandtesque vision, which endows the reflection with a concrete existence, that the chiaroscuro, according to Bal, 'becomes first and foremost a flat image', with the 'glittering of the spangles' themselves becoming an object of vision.[39] The narrator of *Jean Santeuil*'s comments on a kitchen scene — 'c'est une chose qui est'[40] — might well be seen as a voice of such a vision, reappearing later in the *Recherche*, when the 'petit pan de mur jaune' ceases to be the mere representation of a little patch of wall, but emerges as a work of art by itself, an existence that embeds the artist's vision and sheds light on the writer's reflection on his own creativity.

1.4 Slow pace in dim light

In Rembrandt's works, the treatment of colours that produces the unique effect of light and dark, as mentioned earlier, allows an 'influence of indistinctness' in the shadows, as Burnet suggests, different from that of the Roman school which makes 'colours pronounced harshly'.[41] The tones in Rembrandt, having the 'same richness and depth as in Giorgione and Titian', Burnet argues, possess a 'suppleness and lifelike character', as a result of the fact that the cold and hot tints are less blended.[42] The warm tones in the shadow and the concreteness of the reflection produce an overall unified texture, close to what Richard observes in the Proustian domestic scenes as 'le relais

[39] Bal, *The Mottled Screen*, p. 25.

[40] *JS*, p. 320.

[41] Burnet, *Rembrandt and His Works*, p. 50.

[42] Ibid.

substantiel du gras, ou de l'huileux'.[43] Such an 'écoulement d'une clarté' creates an intimate atmosphere of continuity, where the dramatic elements of the chiaroscuro in historical paintings are absent.[44] Instead, what accompanies such an effect in the domestic scene in Proust is often a stillness or certain activities in slow motion as if drenched in the oily existence of light, such as 'l'attente de celle qu'on aime par-dessus tout, qu'on connaît à peine et qu'on attend' in the previously quoted paragraph,[45] and 'le heurt d'une casserole fléchissant sous l'effondrement d'un charbon consumé ou le rare glouglou d'une friture bouillante qui glisse vivement dans la poêle'.[46] The pace of these activities echoes that of the two figures in Rembrandt's *Philosopher in Meditation*, one meditating in the tranquil light, the other in the dark, rearranging the burning wood of the furnace, both in prolonged concentration.

What Proust appreciates in Rembrandt, as Bal points out, does not lie in his historical paintings, but is the non-narrative nature of such genre scenes, the slow pace or the pause of which 'requires another dimension in literature'.[47] The young Proust states in *Contre Sainte-Beuve* his thoughts on the true connection between painting and literature that 'la peinture ne peut atteindre la réalité une des choses et rivaliser par là avec la littérature, qu'à condition de ne pas être littéraire'.[48] In the domestic depictions by Rembrandt and Vermeer, light and shade form tangible materials that

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[43] Richard, *Proust et le monde sensible*, p. 116.

[44] Ibid.

[45] *JS*, p. 353.

[46] Ibid., p. 320.

[47] Bal, *The Mottled Screen*, p. 26.

[48] *CSB*, p. 112.

'[swallow] up' the 'bustle and noises', slowing down the passing moments, or even becoming time themselves.[49] And what literature does, in a similar way, is to be echoed in the *Recherche*, when the protagonist prefers staying in the room to feel the coolness of the shadow in summer, like a hand that stays motionless in a stream of running water.[50]

II Time

According to Merleau-Ponty, time is neither 'un système de positions objectives' as modern science suggests,[51] nor a fluent substance as in the metaphor of the river where the past pushes the present and the present pushes the future.[52] He refutes the Kantian notion of the unified absoluteness of time and denies the detachment of the past, the present and the future. The subject, namely the operation of the body in its relation with the world, he suggests, does not passively receive time, but lives time and is itself the temporality. Genre painting and still lives as observed and 'painted' by Proust, demonstrate precisely the phenomenological qualities of time ignored by mechanical notions and the ideal Kantian belief in the aspect of the multiple temporal layers of daily routines, the integrality of the past, the present, the future, and the subject as constituting temporality.

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[49] Burnet, *Rembrandt and His Works*, p. 30.

[50] *RTP*, I (1987), p. 82.

[51] *PP*, p. 480.

[52] Ibid., pp. 470-71.

2.1 The trace of time in the routines of ordinary life

As Merleau-Ponty suggests, time is not the activity of moments pushing and replacing one another, and the moments should be viewed in a certain transparency so that the past never really goes away and can always be perceived through layers of transparent moments.[53] In the word-painted genre scenes and the works of Chardin contemplated in Proust's juvenilia, such a quality is understood and demonstrated. Depicting the calm scene of the dining couple in the preface of *Jean Santeuil*, Proust writes about the light of the furnace:

> [L]a clarté qu'elle y concentrait sur le mur était si paisible et si empreinte du calme de la vie dont elle éclairait chaque soir les scènes les plus tranquilles à l'heure où les travaux sont finis. (*JS*, p. 188)

The phrase 'chaque soir' naturally points out that the picture painted does not pertain to one particular moment, but to a habitual repetition of the tranquil scene through time. Such predilection persists in the *Recherche* where Proust shows a preference for the imperfect tense which indicates a certain routine of life. The tranquillity in genre paintings is reassuring in that the everyday activity, through repeating itself, becomes the embodiment of familiarity and security, which differs from historical and religious representations. The latter, capturing a once-and-for-all event, grand and splendid as it may seem, would always appear thinner in the realm of time.

It is interesting that the young Proust is often drawn to the tenderness of habit instead of the freshness of first experiences. In *Jean Santeuil*, having breakfast with the Reveillons family, the protagonist witnesses their pleasure in eating the familiar boiled

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[53] Ibid., p. 478.

eggs:

> ce n'était pas comme lui la première fois qu'ils mangeaient des œufs brouillés au lard. Mais le plaisir de l'habitude est souvent plus doux encore que celui de la nouveauté. (*JS*, p. 459)

The aesthetic pleasure of Proust in contemplating an art work that depicts habit, like the pleasure of Jean who eats the egg fried with bacon, lies in the possibility of thousands of moments behind a simple scene. When Proust analyses Chardin's *Saying Grace* (figure 8), he describes:

> Amitié encore, ou mariage, entre les couleurs du devant de feu et les couleurs de la pelote et de l'écheveau de laine, — entre le corps penché, les mains heureuses de la femme qui prépare la table, la nappe antique et les assiettes encore intactes dont depuis tant d'années elle sent la fermeté douce résister toujours à la même place entre ses mains soigneuses, — entre cette nappe et la lumière qui lui donne, en souvenir de ses visites de chaque jour, la douceur de crème ou d'une toile de Flandres, — entre la lumière et toute cette chambre qu'elle caresse, où elle s'endort, où tantôt elle se promène lentement, tantôt elle entre gaiement à l'improviste, si tendrement depuis tant d'années, — entre la chaleur et les étoffes, — entre les êtres et les choses, — entre le passé et la vie, — entre le clair et l'obscur. (*CSB*, p. 380)

Figure 7

Jean-Baptiste Siméon Chardin, *Saying Grace*, 1740, canvas, 49.5 x 38.5 cm, The State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg.

Again and again, Proust observes from Chardin's representation of a prayer before dinner the indication of habit. With the phrase 'depuis tant d'années', the tablecloth and the plates are endowed with a richness in Proust's reading. It is also why Chardin's works are proposed by Mieke Bal to be the 'portraits of time', where in the 'adventures of the vision' common to Chardin and Proust, different layers of temporality are simultaneously presented.[54] Countless moments in the past of the dining room do not constitute a groundless imagination, since 'la nappe antique' and the plates in Chardin's *Saying Grace* (figure 7) have an undeniable quality of being worn by time. In fact, the painting displays an overall worn-out appearance due to the actual erosion of time, such as the cracks and the varnish that has turned dark. Though the condition of the painting is uncertain at the time of Proust's visit, the painting was nevertheless at least a hundred years old. More importantly, with a crudeness of brushstrokes that produces the effect of the 'mottled screen' as described by Bal, and the mild tonality of his colour scheme, the handling style of Chardin veils the still life objects with a sense of antiqueness.[55]

What touches Proust in Chardin similarly draws him to Rembrandt, whose name receives frequent allusion when the young author meditates on the subject of aging. The preferred themes in Rembrandt's genre paintings are often associated with old people and shabby interiors. His *An Old Woman Reading* (figure 8), for example, shows the sympathetic touching of two surfaces bearing the trace of time — the

[54] Bal, *The Mottled Screen*, p. 42.

[55] Ibid., p. 44.

wrinkled skin of the old woman and the soft worn pages of the book that curl at the edge.

Figure 8

Rembrandt, *An Old Woman Reading*, 1631, wood, 60 x 48 cm, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.

2.2 Recent past and impending future

The present, as Merleau-Ponty argues, is only possible through the relation with its adjacent parties — the past and the future, and therefore 'il est essentiel au temps de se faire et de n'être pas, ne n'être jamais complètement constitué'.[56] And to

[56] *PP*, p. 474.

understand time, it is necessary to see it 'à l'état naissant et en train d'appaître'.[57] In the description of daily scenes, Proust attaches great value to the indication of a recent memory and the potential for an impending future. For example, the scene of waiting in *Jean Santeuil* previously cited is pregnant with such a tendency:

> Et parfois, en semaine, avant cette heure-là, l'attente de celle qu'on aime par-dessus tout, qu'on connaît à peine et qu'on attend, pour laquelle on a fait sa chambre si belle et qu'on attend dans la lumière de la lampe, [...], fêtes mystérieuses de l'hiver où la chambre, la visite partie, semble à la fois vidée d'une espérance et parfumée d'un souvenir. (*JS*, p. 353)

The lamp, the open door and the carefully arranged objects in the room, like the plates in Chardin's *Saying Grace* (figure 7) that receive a habitual caress from the hands, in Proust's depiction, become witnesses of time, carrying both the expectation of the visitor not yet arrived and the sweet memory of the finished visit.

On an even smaller timescale, Proust observes closely Chardin's *The Buffet* (figure 9) in 'Chardin et Rembrandt':

> Sur ce buffet où, depuis les plis rapides de la nappe à demi relevée jusqu'au couteau posé de côté, dépassant de toute la lame, tout garde le souvenir de la hâte des domestiques, tout porte le témoignage de la gourmandise des invités. […] Dans un seau de l'eau fraîche traîne à terre, toute poussée encore par le pied rapide qui l'a vivement dérangée. (*CSB*, p. 375)

The tablecloth with its corner turned over and folded up, becomes in Proust's eye the indicator of a movement just finished. Along with the slightly disarranged position of the bucket, it invokes another scene of the hurrying domestic servants only a few seconds before the moment represented in the picture. At the same time, Proust sees a future tendency in the knife, with which the desire of the guests will soon be

[57] Ibid., p. 475.

Figure 9

Jean-Baptiste Siméon Chardin, *The Buffet*, 1728, canvas, 194 x 129 cm, Musée du Louvre, Paris.

satisfied. The vividness in Chardin is even more vividly read by Proust when he describes the food on the table:

> Un chien qui lève la tête ne peut arriver jusqu' [aux pêches] et les rend plus désirables d'être vraiment désirées. […] Transparents comme le jour et désirables comme des sources, des verres où quelques gorgées de vin doux se prélassent comme au fond d'un gosier. […] Un couteau qu'on y a vivement caché et qui marque la précipitation de la jouissance, soulève les disques d'or des citrons qui semblent posés là par le geste de la gourmandise, complétant l'appareil de la volupté. (*CSB*, p. 375)

The desire of a gourmand embodied in the painting allows Proust to see the future, comparing the glass holding the wine to the throat already enjoying the liquid within it. The precipitation shown in the gesture of cutting the citron stimulates the potential joy of consuming of the gourmand, as desiring as the viewer of the painting, and as the cat in Chardin's *The Ray* (figure 10) described by Proust:

Figure 10

Jean-Baptiste Siméon Chardin, *The Ray*, 1725-6, canvas, 114.5 x 146 cm, Musée du Louvre, Paris.

> Puis un chat, superposant à cet aquarium la vie obscure de ses formes plus savantes et plus conscientes, l'éclat de ses yeux posé sur la raie, fait manœuvrer avec une hâte lente le velours de ses pattes sur les huîtres soulevées et décèle à la fois la prudence de son caractère, la convoitise de son palais et la témérité de son entreprise. L'œil qui aime à jouer avec les autres sens et à reconstituer à l'aide de quelques couleurs, plus que tout un passé, tout un avenir, sent déjà la fraîcheur des huîtres qui vont mouiller les pattes du chat. (*CSB*, p. 376)

The eye of the cat, or rather the eye of Proust, discerns the irresistible temptation of the future as well as the danger of the unsteady landing. The moment depicted in the painting thus becomes a culmination of the rush for the desired and a calculation based on past experience, and is therefore crystallised in a peculiar and ephemeral balance.

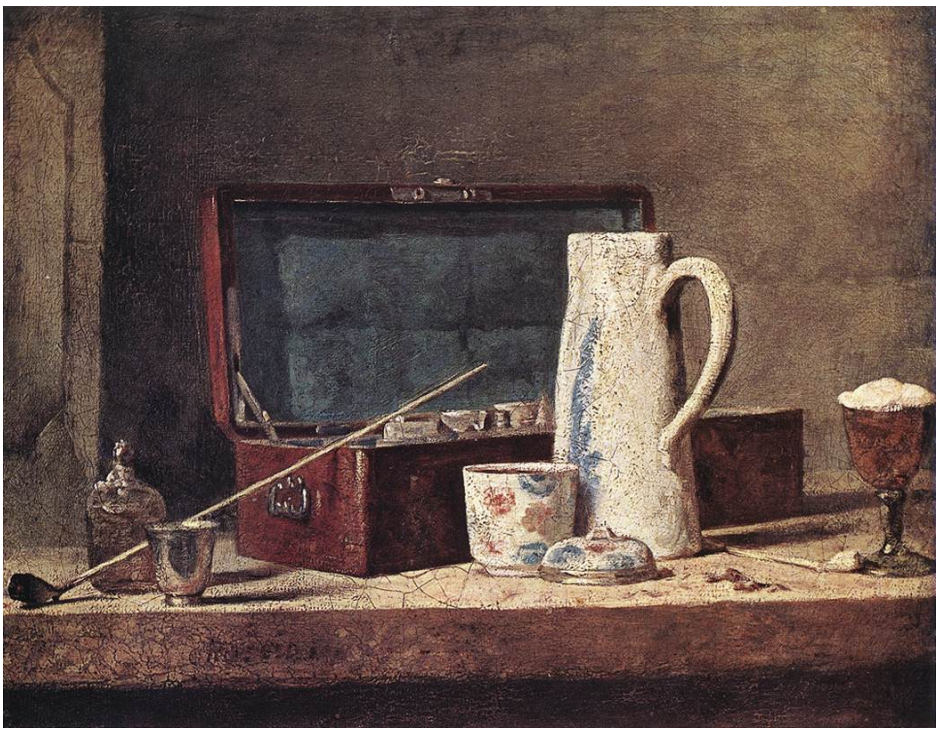

Figure 11

Jean-Baptiste Siméon Chardin, *The Smoker's Case* or *Pipes and Drinking Vessel*, c. 1737, canvas, 32.5 x 40 cm, Musée du Louvre, Paris.

Figure 12

Jean-Baptiste Siméon Chardin, *Les Apprêts d'un déjeuner*, 1726-7, canvas, 81 x 64.5 cm, Musée des Beaux-Arts, Lille.

The indication of desire and potential movement in Chardin's works tends to invoke a projected future or a recent past. As shown in *Pipes and Drinking Vessel* (figure 11), the glass filled to the brim, with the beer foam bulging out and just about to fall – a compelling invitation to be drank, allows the viewer to foresee the sense of relief and satisfaction which they will have afterwards. As for *Preparations for Lunch* (figure 12), the lunch, rather than being described as prepared, would be more properly understood as just begun. The baguette cut open by the knife stuck half way in and even the little bread crusts on the tablecloth can be seen as an indication of the joy of consuming.

2.3 The experience of pure existence

Time, as Merleau-Ponty proposes, has no sense for us unless we are time.[58] In contrast with the Cartesian belief that tears apart body and spirit, we are not

> une activité jointe à une passivité, un automatisme surmonté d'une volonté, une perception surmontée d'un jugement, mais tout actifs et tout passifs parce que nous sommes le surgissement du temps. (*PP*, p. 489)

Therefore, the subject is no longer an observer of the series of events that pass before him/her, but in 'effectu[ant]' the time, participates in the creation of time, in other words, becomes time himself/herself.[59] The genre paintings of Vermeer and Chardin depicting a figure in absorption that evokes the contemplation of time in a pure existence, echo Proust's descriptions of similar scenes. For instance, imagining a pharmacist concentrated in his work, Proust comments:

> [C]'est une chose qui est, comme par la fenêtre le vieux pharmacien absorbé dans un mélange et vivement éclairé par la lampe nous charme aussi parce qu'il est. (*JS*, p. 320)

The charm of the absorbed figure lies in the pure sense of existence of the moment, which witnesses the passing of time. In Chardin's *The Philosopher* (figure 2), the same kind of absorption is shown in the philosopher, beside whom stands an hourglass. The philosopher, unlike the consciously reasoning viewer, forgets the rest of the world, time as events passing before him becomes meaningless. Proust describes in 'Chardin et Rembrandt' how people gaze at the sky like the philosopher painted by Rembrandt, but without reasoning:

> Nous faisons tous comme le philosophe en regardant le ciel, mais nous ne

[58] *PP*, p. 492.

[59] Ibid., p. 481.

> cherchons pas comme lui à prendre conscience de notre joie ou de notre angoisse, de leur essence ou de leur raison. Sans doute même le peintre qui a peint ce philosophe n'a pas raisonné comme le philosophe. Pourtant, il avait bien regardé le ciel comme lui, puisqu'il l'a peint… (*CSB*, p. 381)

The simplicity of a moment without searching for explanations and associations in time paradoxically has an equal value to that of the philosopher's meditation. In Vermeer's *A Woman Holding a Balance* (figure 3), as observed by Wheelock,

> As though waiting for the delicate modulations of the balance to come to rest, she stands transfixed in a moment of equilibrium.[60]

Figure 13

Jean-Baptiste Siméon Chardin, *The Young Draughtsman*, 1737, canvas, 80 x 65 cm, Musée du Louvre, Paris.

[60] Arthur K. Wheelock Jr. and Johannes Vermeer, *Jan Vermeer* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1981), p. 106.

The balance in the woman's hand holds nothing, which eliminates its utility and the connotative association of the moment with other events in time. Like Vermeer's other works, the master 'avoided here the anecdotal'.[61] With no explanations or stories provided, the poetics of the non-event or non-narrative as mentioned earlier at a slow pace indicated in the chiaroscuro effect reappears here. As Proust's comment goes, 'c'est une chose qui est'.

Likewise, Chardin 'refuse[s] to tell a story' in his *The Young Draughtsman* (figure 13). Gabriel Josipovici comments:

> the eyes look down and outward, at the hand which is sharpening the pencil […] but the gaze is, somehow, emanating from the whole body, just as it is the whole body which is focused on the act of sharpening the pencil […]. That is what is meant by absorption […]. We too are in that quiet room, not thinking anything, not doing anything purposive, anything that 'needs doing'. This is order. This is freedom.[62]

The fact that the moment, as an isolated enclosure where the absorbed figure, 'not thinking anything',[63] forgets any concern of utility and consequence, in Proust, as in Chardin, Rembrandt and Vermeer, realises a definition of time recalling Merleau-Ponty's 'je suis moi-même le temps, un temps qui "demeure" et ne "s'écoule" ni ne "change"'.[64]

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[61] Ibid.

[62] Rosenberg, *Chardin*, p. 226.

[63] Ibid.

[64] *PP*, pp. 481-82.

III Space

Classical psychology embraces the notion of 'une spatialité de position',[65] similar to the Kantian definition of a spatial relationship as a form of external experience and things given in this experience[66] as a part of the systems of qualities under an intelligible law.[67] For Merleau-Ponty, these theories of objectified spatiality fall short, for they regard the conscience of places as a positional, instead of situational conscience.[68] Space, according to Merleau-Ponty, is not the place where things are disposed, but 'le moyen par lequel la position des choses devient possible',[69] and the way it works should be comprehended as 'spatialisant' instead of 'spatialisé'. It is the body working as a mobilised power tending towards things in situations that makes this spatialising possible.[70] Far from being a passive recipient, the body actively assumes and inhabits space and time in movements.[71] Such a phenomenological understanding of spatiality helps us to see how the vision of Proust views space in the still lives and genre paintings of Chardin and how he comprehends the active creation of space by the artist. The bodily engaged vision of space can be discerned in various structures such as the fissure, the protrusion and the juxtaposition.

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[65] Ibid., p. 116.

[66] Ibid., p. 281.

[67] Ibid., p. 122.

[68] Ibid., p. 121.

[69] Ibid., p. 281.

[70] Ibid., p. 122.

[71] Ibid., p. 119.

3.1 The fissure of a structure

When Proust observes Chardin's *The Ray* (figure 10), he guides the reader to see the ray as a cathedral:

> Mais au-dessus de vous un monstre étrange, frais encore comme la mer où il ondoya, une raie est suspendue, dont la vue mêle au désir de la gourmandise le charme curieux […]. Elle est ouverte et vous pouvez admirer la beauté de son architecture délicate et vaste, teintée de sang rouge, de nerfs bleus et de muscles blancs, comme la nef d'une cathédrale polychrome. (*CSB*, pp. 375-76)

Proust notes that the ray is open, which reveals an inner space that invites the eye to explore. The openness of the ray becomes an essential element for the viewer to contemplate the architecture-like structure of a well depicted object, adding a delicate depth to the painting. Although, as Bal points out, there is a certain flatness of the ray indicated by the fact that 'the outside and inside are represented at the same time',[72] it is hard to deny that in regarding the body of the ray as the nave of a cathedral, Proust's vision moves away from accepting a presentation of dissected spatial parts to experiencing and living the spatial structure in the Merleau-Pontian manner, which involves a 'mouvement virtuel' of the body inside an architecture.[73]

It is worth noting that in many of Chardin's still life paintings, the openness of an object seems to deliberately invite the viewer to imagine an inner structure. Although less explicit than those in the previously mentioned still lives such as *The Buffet*, these open structures bear signification of simultaneous movement. As Merleau-Ponty suggests, perception is not posterior to the movements, instead they

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[72] Bal, *The Mottled Screen*, p. 36.

[73] *PP*, p. 126.

Figure 14

Jean-Baptiste Siméon Chardin, *A Lady Taking Tea*, 1735, canvas, 80 x 101 cm, Hunterian Art Gallery, University of Glasgow, Glasgow.

Figure 15

Jean-Baptiste Siméon Chardin, *The House of Cards* or *The Son of M. Le Noir Amusing Himself by Making a House of Cards*, c. 1737, canvas, 60 x 72 cm, The National Gallery, London.

'forment un système qui se modifie comme un tout'.[74] The perception of an open cut of a structure already involves a movement of entering as indicated in Proust's metaphor of the nave. Such perception is also present in other works of Chardin. For example, in *Les Apprêts d'un déjeuner* (figure 12), the baguette is not only split in half with the rough edge, but also stabbed with a knife, making the depth of space a synonym for the virtual movements of the body. In addition, the open chest drawers in *A Lady Taking Tea* (figure 14) and *The House of Cards* (figure 15) also show Chardin's careful arrangement of a subtle spatial composition as a subjective assumption of the body movement.

On a larger scale, the door, as an open cut of a room, is also an important indicator of space in Dutch genre paintings. In the waiting scene in *Jean Santeuil* already commented upon, Proust does not forget to mention 'dans la lumière de la lampe, l'obcurité des coins, la porte parfois ouverte pour écouter'.[75] The Proustian space here is not described in terms of the objective position of a room as related to the door, but presented as an extension of a sensible body that listens beyond the open cut of a structure. In Chardin's *The Return from Market* (figure 16), Rosenberg notes 'the play of the open doors':

> The rooms are alternately bathed in shadow or inundated with light, and a minute triangle of blue sky can be seen at the end, above the young couple standing in the doorway.[76]

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[74] Ibid., p. 129.

[75] *JS*, p. 353.

[76] Rosenberg, *Chardin*, p. 234.

Figure 16

Jean-Baptiste Siméon Chardin, *The Return from Market*, 1739, canvas, 47 x 38 cm, Musée du Louvre, Paris.

The open doors here allow the vision to comprehend movements that construct space, including the virtual movement of the body of the viewer that coincides with the person depicted in the picture, a woman, as indicated in the title, who has just returned from the market.

Similarly, 'the expressive use of space' as a feature of Delft genre painting, is also well practised by Vermeer.[77] In his *A Girl Asleep* (figure 17), a painting as Yoshikawa suggests that Proust might have seen,[78] the door in the background is left half open, and it is not unusual to suggest that although the girl is dozing, she is still listening

[77] Watkins, *Masters of Seventeenth-Century Dutch Genre Painting*, p. xix.

[78] Yoshiwaka, *Proust et l'art pictural*, p. 84.

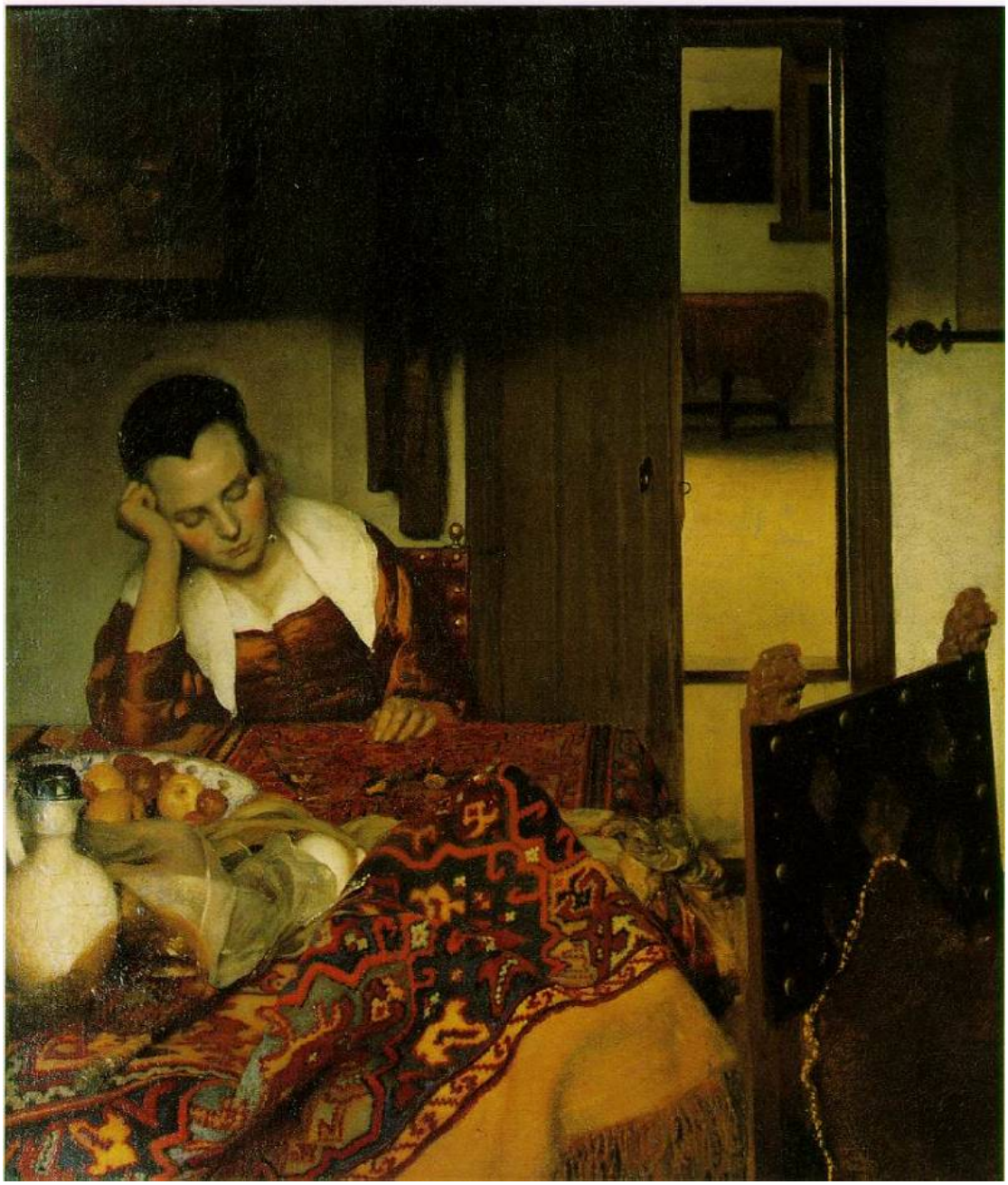

Figure 17

Johannes Vermeer, *A Girl Asleep*, 1657, canvas, 87.6 x 76.5 cm, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

through the door in a semi-conscious state. The presence of the space as indicated through the open door, just as in Proust's description in *Jean Santeuil*, 'la porte parfois ouverte pour écouter', is thus lived both in the paintings of Chardin and Vermeer and the descriptions of genre scenes in Proust.[79]

3.2 Protruding structure

In Chardin's *The Buffet* (figure 10), Proust points out another element of spatial composition in inverted form — the protruding knife:

> Sur la table les couteaux actifs, qui vont droit au but, reposent dans une oisiveté menaçante et inoffensive. (*CSB*, p. 375)

The reason why the position of the knife is 'menaçante et inoffensive', could be that in perceiving the suspended handle and the covered blade, Proust incorporates the spatial relationship of the knife and its surroundings into body gestures of pointing and cutting, coming to terms with their tendency of movement and the potential obstacle. Proust sees in the knife a phenomenal place, which as Merleau-Ponty argues, is not defined by its objective position but the task of the body in a certain situation.[80]

A considerable number of similar knives could be seen in Chardin's other still life paintings, and there are also other objects that create the effect of an opened-up space, such as the carnations in Chardin's *Basket of Wild Strawberries* (figure 18), on which the Goncourt brothers commented:

> Look at the two carnations…step back a bit and the flowers rise up from the

[79] *JS*, p. 353.

[80] *PP*, p. 289.

canvas as you move away…Such is the miracle of Chardin's painting.[81]

Figure 18

Jean-Baptiste Siméon Chardin, *Basket of Wild Strawberries*, 1761, canvas, 38 x 46 cm, private collection.

In these works, the artist's vision is apparently not a passive recipient of spatiality, but one that actively assumes and arranges it (especially in the case of Chardin who was highly conscious of the spatial composition and carefully laid out the objects in a satisfactory grouping to be painted). The space is comprehended, through the 'prise de mon corps sur le monde', and thus lived in Proust's vision of Chardin's still lives as well as in the artist's powerful gestures seen in the paintings.[82]

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[81] Cit. in Rosenberg, *Chardin*, p. 291.

[82] *PP*, p. 289.

3.3 Juxtaposition

When describing the still lives in Chardin's *The Buffet* (figure 10), Proust pays special attention to two twin goblets:

> Transparents comme le jour et désirables comme des sources, des verres où quelques gorgées de vin doux se prélassent comme au fond d'un gosier, sont à côté de verres déjà presque vides, comme à côté des emblèmes de la soif ardente, les emblèmes de la soif apaisée. (*CSB*, p. 375)

The juxtaposition of two almost identical goblets in Chardin is interpreted by Proust as two signifiers of opposing connotations based on nuances of their states. The composition of a pair of identical objects with a difference in Chardin not only creates a symmetrical balance in space, but also exhibits a charm in the difference which is almost symbolic, like that of the two wine bottles in *The Return from Market* (figure 16). In other works of Chardin, similar pairs can also be found. Be it the fish, the cruets, the garlic and the pieces of bread in *Still Life with Fish, Vegetables, Gougères, Pots, and Cruets on a Table* (figure 19), or the pomegranates in *Grapes and Pomegranates* (figure 20), they are hardly presented as near identical. The slight difference provokes a deeper speculation of symbolic indication. Proust's vision that brings the juxtaposed pair of different objects into contact reflects a desire to comprehend the allegory of opposition, and even finally to merge them into a single entity. Georges Poulet notices in the *Recherche* the description of the church towers of Martinville that gradually

Figure 19

Jean-Baptiste Siméon Chardin, *Still Life with Fish, Vegetables, Gougères, Pots, and Cruets on a Table*, 1769, canvas, 70 x 60 cm, The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles.

Figure 20

Jean-Baptiste Siméon Chardin, *Grapes and Promegranates*, 1763, canvas, 47 x 57 cm, Musée du Louvre, Paris.

merge into one as the protagonist's view point moves away, which demonstrates Proust's interest in the totality in space achieved 'par la coïncidence des contraires'.[83]

Coexistence in space, according to Merleau-Ponty, has many similar characteristics to coexistence in time, and as Poulet argues, the writing of Proust resembles the juxtaposition of a series of disparate paintings that belong to different periods of time.[84] The idea of juxtaposition not only exists within Chardin's still lives, but also manifests itself as a way in which the genre paintings as pieces of art works are considered in a spatial composition in an allegory to time, just as that which Proust evokes when he wrote about the memories of his military service in his short essay 'Tableaux de genre du souvenir', comparing them to 'une suite, coupée de lacunes […] de petits tableaux pleins de vérité heureuse et de charme'.[85] The juxtaposition in space, when employed as a way of viewing time as in Proust's writing, as Poulet suggests, finds its place in Bergson's illustration of the attitude of spirit in the triangular diagram.[86] The top of the triangle represents the attention to the present, the future, and the action, whereas the base of the triangle represents the total of one's past that never fades away.[87] Since people habitually focus on solving problems at hand in order to move forward in time, attaining a state that allows the spatial juxtaposition of time of one's past proves to be a rare situation, and only those in a dying experience would possibly see 'un panorama de [leur] existence entière', an extreme case of such a

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[83] Georges Poulet, *L'Espace proustien* (Paris: Gallimard, 1982), p. 102.

[84] *PP*, p. 306.

[85] *JS*, pp. 130-31.

[86] *PP*, p. 158.

[87] Ibid., p. 167.

state.[88] The aesthetic value of juxtaposition that Proust appreciates in a painting is thus linked with a vision that reveals a state of mind present in both literature and the visual arts.

IV Formal and sensory interaction

4.1 Correspondence in colour

Rationalists believe the pre-existent set of knowledge on colours to be prior to one's colour recognition in real life, whereas for Empiricists, colour is an absolute quality of an object derived from experience, and although perceptions vary according to light and environment, there is only one correct perception of colour realised under normal conditions. Merleau-Ponty questions both of the above presumptions by explaining the process of colour perception. According to Merleau-Ponty, the perception of colour is a gradual process where the operation of the attention alters the structure of the conscience. The initial phase of this process, as he observes in the infants' perception, revealingly demonstrates the relationship among colours. As he notes, the first nine months of one's life, only the colourful and the achromatic can be distinguished, following which is the division between 'des teintes "chaudes" et des teintes "froides"', and the details of colours come only last.[89] Judging from his observation, colours belonging to the same phenomenological group of warm and

[88] Ibid., p. 144.

[89] Ibid., p. 38.

cold are naturally associated in a period prior to the intervention of logic and language. In Proust's description of the domestic world depicted by Chardin, he notes such colour correlation and values it as an essential element that brings a genre painting to life. For instance, he names this kind of relation 'amitié' in his analysis of Chardin's *The Diligent Mother* (figure 21):

Figure 21

Jean-Baptiste Siméon Chardin, *The Diligent Mother*, 1740, canvas, 49 x 39 cm, Musée du Louvre, Paris.

> Amitié encore, ou mariage, entre les couleurs du devant de feu et les couleurs de la pelote et de l'écheveau de laine. (*CSB*, p. 380)

In Proust's vision, the colour composition of the painting achieves a harmonious state where the warmness of red and of pink echo in a triangle in the lower part of the

picture. Similarly, in *Jean Santeuil*, when describing the protagonist enjoying a tart on a Sunday noon, Proust emphasises the warm colours that interact within the 'word painting' carefully arranged at his hand:

> Tarte essentiellement dominicale, contemplée avec admiration et mangée avec délices pendant ces midis de dimanche, avec la petite rue en face de soi de plain-pied et le ciel violet des jours de pluie ou le reflet d'or des jours de soleil qui semblaient toutes les couleurs complémentaires de la belle tarte jaune voilée de jus rougeâtre. (*JS*, p. 345)

On Proust's palette, the interactions between the violet of the sky and the golden reflection of the sunlight, between the yellow tart and the reddish sauce, form two individual pairs of correlation in colour, and these two pairs are at the same time synonyms of each other by their internal relation and the common warmness in tone, wrapping the whole picture in an overall harmony.

4.2 Personified expressions

The notion of friendship is further developed in Proust's comments on Chardin as the 'amitié entre les êtres et les choses'[90] where the objects are seen as vividly personified and the human figures as morphed into objects:

> Vous avez vu les objets et fruits vivants comme des personnes, et la figure des personnes, d'une peau, d'un duvet, d'une couleur curieuse à considérer comme des fruits. Chardin va plus loin encore en réunissant objets et personnes dans ces chambres qui sont plus qu'un objet et peut-être aussi qu'une personne; qui sont le lieu de leur vie, la loi de leurs affinités ou de leurs contrastes, le parfum flottant et contenu de leur charme […]. Comme entre êtres et choses qui vivent depuis longtemps ensemble avec simplicité, ayant besoin les uns des autres, goûtant aussi des plaisirs obscurs à se trouver les uns avec les autres, tout ici est amitié. (*CSB*, p. 379)

[90] *CSB*, p. 380.

Through his reflection on harmony in Chardin's genre paintings, Proust provides a vision that treasures the blurring of boundaries between humans and objects, adding a touch of freshness and texture to the depiction of humans and bringing the objects

Figure 22

Jean-Baptiste Siméon Chardin, *Basket of Peaches with Walnuts, Knife and Glass of Wine*, 1768, canvas, 32.4 x 39 cm, Musée du Louvre, Paris.

Figure 23

Jean-Baptiste Siméon Chardin, *The Cellar Boy Cleaning a Large Jug or The Cellar Boy*, 1736, canvas, 46 x 38 cm, private collection.

to life with an intimate connotation. If one observes Chardin's *The Young Draughtsman* (figure 13) side by side with *Basket of Peaches with Walnuts, Knife and Glass of Wine* (figure 22), it is not difficult to discern a similar warmth of colour in the taint of pink on the cheek of the boy and the ripened skin of the peaches. And in *The Cellar Boy* (figure 23), the hue of the boy's flush seems to reflect the brightness of the buckets on the floor at the corner of the painting. Proust's understanding of the friendship between humans and objects in Chardin's works not only concerns the phenomenological similarity of texture and colour, but also involves the enrichment of intimate daily contact, through which the two exist in a interactional relationship. Therefore, the personification here does not stop at the surface of a rhetorical device, but points to a highly interactional perceptual experience.

Merleau-Ponty's idea of the relationship between the subject and the object, or between the self and the world, can be used to explain the intimate intertwining roles of the two in Proust's reading of Chardin:

> [L]e monde est inséparable du sujet, mais d'un sujet qui n'est rien que projet du monde, et le sujet est inséparable du monde, mais d'un monde qu'il projette lui-même. (*PP*, p. 491)

According to Merleau-Ponty, there is no absolute subject segregated from the object, and the world and the self are thus synonymous. Therefore, the perception of a colour or a spatial structure is always related to the act of living the colour or the structure. Proust's interpretation of Chardin's world underlines such a perceptual experience where

> [c]omme la Princesse réveillée, chacun est rendu à la vie, reprend ses couleurs, se met à causer avec vous, à vivre, à durer. (*CSB*, pp. 374-5)

The words ‘vivre’ and ‘durer’ are not simply expressions to compliment the skilful treatments of Chardin that depict a vivid appearance of objects. They involve a deeper concern with being and perceiving the world, where the object lives because of its intertwined relationship with the subject. Therefore, the personification in Proust’s vision of Chardin could be in a way seen as a manifestation of the Merleau-Pontian way of understanding perception.

Proust’s observation of the living objects in Chardin becomes his own manner of perception when he describes the hotel where the protagonist lodges in *Jean Santeuil*:

> Jean resta une fois à coucher à l’hôtel d’Angleterre. Pour la première fois de sa vie dans une chambre nouvelle il ne fut pas angoissé, pas triste. Comme il entrait et la mort dans l’âme allait poser ses affaires, un petit fauteuil les reçut dans ses bras de bois blanc et les garda gentiment près de lui. Une table attendait, l’encrier tendu, qu’il voulût écrire. La double porte s’était fermée, et la tenture ayant fait faire le silence avait comme éloigné tous les autres si loin qu’il avait envie de sauter de joie et d’embrasser à travers la molle tenture la petite porte close sur laquelle il pouvait compter pour ne plus se rouvrir. Cependant, derrière la table une petite cheminée en bois sculpté lui faisait du feu, et un fauteuil en était approché, se faisant si bas, si large et si rond qu’il n’aurait pas un mouvement à faire pour se bien chauffer [...] Il approcha son fauteuil du feu mais n’y toucha pas pour ne rien déranger à ce tableau tranquille du bonheur auquel il venait accéder, laissant la flamme succéder à la flamme. Ce feu bien fait semblait avoir la vie, sinon d’une personne, au moins d’une œuvre, d’un portrait au fond duquel il semble qu’une pensée veille, d’un air de musique qu’on écoute et où on se surprend à accorder aux sons tirés des tuyaux d’un orgue comme une sorte d’existence et d’âme. Ainsi ce feu bien fait faisait au fond de la pièce le fond harmonieux, presque parlant, d’une scène de bonheur. Ainsi dans son doux et imperceptible chuchotement il y avait comme une intention bienveillante et une fine essence. (*JS*, pp. 551-5)

Such is the Chardinesque tableau ‘painted’ by Proust. The furnitures are no longer merely furnitures in Proust’s depiction, with the chair receiving Jean’s belongings in its arms like a human gently taking care of them, a table that awaits and the doors

securely protecting him as if with the consideration of a friend. Furthermore, in this 'tableau' of happiness, the fire seems to be speaking with the thoughts of a human being. The objects painted in Proust's scene of warmth come to life just as what he observes in Chardin's works, for the objects are no longer objects, but as previously mentioned in the analysis of spatiality, they are the embodiment of intentional gestures of the subject, which does not merely perceive but even more significantly lives the world.

4.3 Synesthesia

Dividing experience into different categories of senses, according to Merleau-Ponty, is a problematic way of understanding perception. He argues that in the primordial perception, the distinctions among senses such as that between touch and vision are unknown.[91] As one of his favourite illustrative ideas on the binocular vision goes, one's experiences of the world, he asserts, 's'intègrent à un seul monde comme l'image double disparaît dans la chose unique'.[92] Furthermore, the integral nature of the senses of perception lays a foundation for vision to be able to include other senses, since it concerns 'l'aire vitale du sujet' that takes the objects as part of his 'univers moteur'.[93] Therefore, one not only sees colours and contours in a painting, but also 'la profondeur, le velouté, la mollesse, la dureté des objets', and even as Merleau-Ponty quotes Cézanne, the smell. In this way, if the painter wishes to depict the world, as he

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[91] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Sens et non-sens* (Paris: Nagel, 1966), p. 26.

[92] *PP*, p. 380.

[93] Ibid., p. 136.

suggests, the arrangement of colour should contain 'ce Tout indivisible', rendering the work of art in 'l'unité impérieuse', 'la présence' and 'la plénitude insurpassable'.[94] In seeing two still lives of Chardin, namely *The Ray* (figure 10) and *The Buffet* (figure 9), Proust integrates different senses in his visual perception, and his blurring of sensory boundaries is not merely a proof of excellence in pure imagination, but a demonstration of what a painting should contain to define 'le réel' in phenomenological terms. Further on in the paintings of domestic scenes created on his own in *Jean Santeuil*, the inter-sensory interactions appear precisely in the way that he comprehends the vision of Chardin.

In perception, especially in a primordial perception, according to Merleau-Ponty, a piece of art work is comprehended in its totality.[95] There is therefore not 'une réalité-pour-la-vue', but 'une réalité absolue'. [96] As Merleau-Ponty underlines Cézanne's idea that every touch of colour should contain 'l'air, la lumière, l'objet, le plan, le caractère, le dessin, le style'.[97] Such a proposition explains why in front of Chardin's *The Ray* (figure 10), a series of inter-sensory experiences are evoked by Proust:

> Mais au-dessus de vous un monstre étrange, frais encore comme la mer où il ondoya, une raie est suspendue, dont la vue mêle au désir de la gourmandise le charme curieux du calme ou des tempêtes de la mer dont elle fut le formidable témoin, faisant passer comme un souvenir du Jardin des Plantes à travers un goût de restaurant. (*CSB*, pp. 375-76)

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[94] Merleau-Ponty, *Sens*, p. 26.

[95] Ibid., p. 31.

[96] *PP*, p. 367.

[97] Ibid., p. 373.

The view of the ray for Proust involves the coexistence of two different worlds, one in which the taste of a dish in a restaurant dominates, the other being the spectacle of the ocean where the sights and sounds of a tempest are at play. These descriptions are no longer the distant and objective comments often made by art critics, for whom a work of art is a given visual account, but are experiences lived by the subject as if he were eating the ray or he himself becomes the ray that witnesses an ocean tempest. As Merleau-Ponty comments:

> Une chose n'est donc pas effectivement donnée dans la perception, elle est reprise intérieurement par nous, reconstituée et vécue par nous en tant qu'elle est liée à un monde dont nous portons avec nous les structures fondamentales et dont elle n'est qu'une des concrétions possibles. (*PP*, p. 377)

In this interior reconstruction, the different sensory experiences are no longer properties of an object. They exist as 'un certain type de symbiose'[98] of the subject who lives them and accepts them in a 'montage général'[99] where the senses are naturally associated with one another.

As a further insight into the integrality of sensory experiences based on psychological observations, Merleau-Ponty points out that study of pure touch on normal human beings that excludes other sensory faculties is impossible, for tactile information and visual information are not juxtaposed, but are processed under the presupposition of other senses.[100] Therefore, vision could not be vision but for the support of other sensory experiences since 'chacune [expérience sensuelle] est

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[98] Ibid., p. 367.

[99] Ibid., p. 377.

[100] *PP*, p. 138.

présupposée dans la définition de l'autre'.[101] This explains how the eye of the animals in Chardin's works has a significant role for Proust, for example that of the dog in *The Buffet* (figure 9) which realises a perception beyond the boundary of senses as quoted above:

> Un chien qui lève la tête ne peut arriver jusqu'à elles [les pêches] et les rend plus désirables d'être vraiment désirées. Son œil les goûte et surprend sur le duveté de leur peau qu'elle humecte, la suavité de leur saveur.[102]

Here, the senses of vision, touch and taste exist in a more organically interlaced relationship than merely a rhetorical device, for the taste of the peaches and the texture of the skin are not evoked by the notion of an object in the painting, but are brought to life through the visual rendering of colour and form. Therefore, synesthesia for Proust and Chardin, does not consists in the content beyond the phenomenon, but is already in the visual phenomenon itself. In Proust's depiction of the cat in Chardin's *The Ray* (figure 10), such a notion is more evidently pointed out:

> L'œil qui aime à jouer avec les autres sens et à reconstituer à l'aide de quelques couleurs, plus que tout un passé, tout un avenir, sent déjà la fraîcheur des huîtres qui vont mouiller les pattes du chat et on entend déjà, au moment où l'entassement précaire de ces nacres fragiles fléchira sous le poids du chat, le petit cri de leur fêlure et le tonnerre de leur chute. (*CSB*, p. 376)

The cat's eye touches the oysters and hears the cracking and falling sound of the oysters. In Proust's vision, the play of senses is thus naturally represented in his interpretation of desire in Chardin's works. As can also be seen in Chardin's *Cat with Ray, Oysters, Pitchers and Loaf of Bread* (figure 24), the extended paw of the cat and

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[101] Ibid.

[102] *CSB*, p. 375.

its eyes full of yearning already involve the taste and the touch of the oysters.

Figure 24

Jean-Baptiste Siméon Chardin, *Cat with Ray, Oysters, Pitchers and Loaf of Bread*, c. 1728, canvas, 80 x 63 cm, Foundación Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid.

One more thing to note in Proust's vision of the cat's eye is that the integrality not only involves different senses, but also contains different moments in time (the cat stepping on the oysters, the shells cracking and falling). Interestingly, according to Merleau-Ponty, since the belief of the thing and the world refers to the presumption of 'une synthèse achevée' which rationalised the distant and the unverified phenomena, the synesthesia that integrates different senses such as the touch of the oyster and the cracking sound of its shell, resembles the way that an image results from the organic integration of binocular vision, and at the same time 'se confond avec

le mouvement même par lequel le temps passe' in which no clear division of the present and the future is discerned.[103]

According to Merleau-Ponty, one cannot perceive with the belief that only one sense is at play without speaking with other senses, for the senses are naturally correlated by definition.[104] The interaction among senses that Proust sees in Chardin is also recreated in Proust's own domestic descriptions. How Chardin uses colour and form to produce a harmonious overall picture that involves multiple sensory elements is utilised and emphasised in words by Proust, for instance, in his description of the arrival of Jean's cousins on a Sunday in *Jean Santeuil*:

> le cousin et la cousine de Jean venaient déjeuner, très apprêtés tous les deux dans leurs beaux habits comme les autres Illiersois le dimanche, ayant dans leur parler doux et leur peau rose comme les couleurs complémentaires de l'odeur du magasin, des rayons d'étoffe où M. Clinsiers appelait M. Fernand en faisant claquer son ongle sur son doigt ('Qu'est-ce que ça veut dire?') et de la couleur du soleil qui, répandu sur la place, entrait en plein sur les rayons d'étoffe. (*JS*, p. 345)

The voice of the cousins, the colour of their cheeks, the smell in the store, the texture of the fabric and the light of the sun form a harmonious multi-sensory picture that unites visual, audial, olfactory and tactile beauty. Such a harmony is a further extension of the interaction of colours on a Sunday noon as previously analysed. In both descriptions, it is evident that Proust consciously matches the colours and sensory elements to compose an integrated picture of a village life. The totality of such ordinary genre scenes stands out in a stylistic commonality of warmth and intimacy shared with

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[103] *PP*, p. 381.

[104] Ibid., p. 368.

Chardin and Rembrandt. Such a stylistic trait in a way resembles a non-reflecting state which is natural and free of analytical sophistication, close to the world that Merleau-Ponty named primordial that emphasises the wholeness of perception where the segregation of different senses has not yet taken place. Therefore, descriptions that bear a trait of genre paintings of Chardin and Rembrandt not only reveal a preference for the value of a modest and humble life, but also point to a phenomenological predilection, which is indispensable for capturing the essence of being, just as what Proust evokes in one of the domestic scenes as 'la beauté qu'il y a à être':

> C'était un de ces moments paisibles où les choses sont comme environnées de la beauté qu'il y a à être, où le charme est dans l'ombre qui emplit le fond de cette pièce où est le lit des petits enfants, dans la douce lumière qui blanchit le pied du lit, dans le tic-tac de la pendule, dans la figure, bien éclairée par la lampe, de la cuisinière qui bavarde, dans le fond mystérieux de la cuisine éclairée des rouges reflets de l'invisible brasier où se consomment les opérations délicieuses qui se révèlent seulement par le heurt d'une casserole fléchissant sous l'effondrement d'un charbon consumé ou le rare glouglou d'une friture bouillante qui glisse vivement dans la poêle. (*JS*, p. 320)

The 'tic-tac' of the clock, the voice of the cook and the 'glouglou' of the oil in the pot, all these mild and soothing little sounds are woven into Proust's genre scene, along with the colours and shapes of humans and objects, illustrating an organic interaction among senses. Yet such interaction is even less clearly pointed out as in the previously cited paragraph. By evoking the simplicity of being, Proust himself removes the traces of the contriving effort of a painter and values the moments free of reflexive reasoning. Therefore, in what resembles a primordial state, the senses flow out as existence for themselves and the differences among them are no longer apparent.

V The Particularity of genre painting

The particularity of the relationship between genre paintings and Proust's early writings is worth noting. 'Chardin et Rembrandt' as one of the principle works analysed in this chapter, witnesses a transformative phase in an aesthetic apprenticeship. The subject as well as the overall atmospheric style of genre paintings that often involve the everyday warmth and tenderness not only naturally associate with the desire of a young heart, but also approach the Merleau-Pontian primordial state of mind where rationalised significations have not yet taken form.

5.1 Lesson on the aesthetic value of everyday scenes

Written in Proust's youth, 'Chardin et Rembrandt' is, as Hugues Azérad comments, 'l'enfance de l'image proustienne'.[105] The age of the young protagonist in 'Chardin et Rembrandt', coincides with the age of the protagonist when he observes the domestic scenes in *Jean Santeuil*, as well as that of Marcel in the *Recherche*, as Azérad points out, when he pays the significant visit to Elstir.[106] Therefore the genre paintings discussed in this chapter represented by the works of Rembrandt, Vermeer and Chardin as well as the still lives of Chardin exhibit a transformative power for the young mind, and the early writings of Proust witness such a power in the apprenticeship of vision, which as Aubert analyses, causes Proust to 'reconsidérer sa position de voyant'

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[105] Hugues Azérad, '"La beauté d'une image": (Mé)connaissance de l'image chez Marcel Proust', *Dalhousie French Studies*, 92 (2010), 43-57 (p. 46).

[106] Ibid., p. 47.

and 'repenser son rapport à l'écriture'.[107]

At the beginning of 'Chardin et Rembrandt', Proust describes a young man bored of the Chardinesque interior of his dining room:

> Prenez un jeune homme de fortune modeste, de goûts artistes, assis dans la salle à manger au moment banal et triste où on vient de finir de déjeuner et où la table n'est pas encore complètement desservie [...] Sur le buffet un peu de soleil, en touchant gaiement le verre d'eau que des lèvres désaltérées ont laissé presque plein, accentue cruellement, comme un rire ironique, la banalité traditionnelle de ce spectacle inesthétique. (*CSB*, p. 372)

The young man that distains 'cette médiocrité domestique' is to change his aesthetic judgement after contemplating the works of Chardin, which enlighten him not only on the value of a painting genre, but also on the beauty of his own life, for towards the end of the paragraphs on Chardin, Proust thus points out the quality the latter's works:

> N'étant nullement un étalage de qualités spéciales, mais l'expression de ce qu'il y avait de plus intime dans sa vie et de ce qu'il y a de plus profond dans les choses, c'est à notre vie qu'elle s'adresse, c'est notre vie qu'elle vient toucher, lentement incline vers les choses, rapproche du cœur des choses. (*CSB*, pp. 381-82)

The closer observation and the deeper appreciation of the ordinary surroundings in life commented on above result from a certain spiritual power, which in this case refers to the masters' particular ways of perceiving. The vision of Chardin, as Proust comments,

> avait proclamé la divine égalité de toutes choses devant l'esprit qui les considère, devant la lumière qui les embellit. (*CSB*, p. 380)

One reason for the charm of the ordinary details of life according to Proust, resides in the spirit which, while contemplating the objects, eliminates the difference in

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[107] Aubert, *Proust: La Traduction du sensible*, p. 68.

material and social value, and therefore the actual subjects of painting recede onto a lesser pronounced ground. In his essay 'Rembrandt', on the figures and objects in the master's paintings, he states that 'ce ne sont pas des choses que Rembrandt a peintes, ce sont les goûts de Rembrandt'.[108] The practical significance of things is placed in a lower position than that of taste, namely the aesthetic preference or the style of the painter, which in Rembrandt's case designates the manner in which he portrays the light:

> Il est certain qu'il a vu que cela était son jour propre et qu'au moment [où] il y voyait une chose, elle devenait pour lui riche, propre à engendrer en lui d'autres observations pleines de profondeur […] Et dans ce qu'on appelle la troisième manière de Rembrandt, il est visible que ce jour doré où il lui était essentiel et, comme conséquence de cela, si fécond et, comme signe de cela, si émouvant, de voir les choses, est devenu pour lui toute la réalité. (*CSB*, pp. 660-61)

What Proust finds as the essence of Rembrandt transcends the meaning of the subjects he portrays, and becomes the reality of Rembrandt's life and his fundamental creativity. Here, the value of the subjectivity of a vision is clearly recognised by Proust. Turning the commonly dismissed valueless objects into precious artefacts is therefore also understandable in his own writing. For instance, when describing a dinner scene in *Jean Santeuil*, Proust compares it to a museum:

> Le joli musée qu'un dîner, quand ce goût d'eau de mer dont, dans notre ville du milieu des terres, nous rêvions jusqu'à le sentir, nous est présenté presque facile à toucher, humide à la fleur de la coupe argentée et pierreuse, quand la couleur du vin brille comme la couleur d'un tableau sous la protection transparente du verre, quand les plats apportés sans relâche dans des plats d'argent sur la table éblouissante nous donnent en une heure la sensation pleine et directe de ces divers chefs-d'œuvre dont le désir de l'un suffit à remplir de charme une heure oisive et d'appétit. (*JS*, p. 572)

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[108] *CSB*, p. 660.

Figure 25

Jean-Baptiste Siméon Chardin, *Jar of Apricots*, 1758, oval canvas, 57 x 51 cm, Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto.

The colour of wine reminds the protagonist of the colour of a painting under the protection of the glass, which might correspond to the beauty of Chardin's *The Jar of Apricots* (figure 25), when the admiration of the viewer towards the glass of wine and towards the work of art itself merge in Proust's simile, just as he notes that after the teaching of Chardin, one might comment on his own surroundings with an attentive admiration, saying 'cela est beau comme un Chardin'.[109]

[109] *CSB*, p. 374.

5.2 Solitude and comfort of a primordial state

Apart from the ordinary subject, another quality of genre paintings that attracts Proust is the nature of non-events in the moment depicted in the tableau. As Proust describes in 'Tableaux de genre du souvenir', it is 'un moment bien simple de leur existence, sans événements solennels, parfois sans événements du tout'.[110] It is such simplicity in a sense of gentle comfort that leads to the contemplation of being, purity and origin.

Young Proust's appreciation of genre scenes and still life paintings to some extent reveals his attachment to the gentle memory of childhood and the familiarity of domestic life. The sense of well-being and simplicity seems to provide a protection from the complicity, the vanity and the clamour of social life toward which Proust already starts to show his aversion. The description of the double doors at the hotel in *Jean Santeuil* provides a vivid illustration of such a sentiment:

> La double porte s'était refermée, et la tenture ayant fait faire le silence avait comme éloigné tous les autres si loin qu'il avait envie de sauter de joie et d'embrasser à travers la molle tenture la petite porte close sur laquelle il pouvait compter pour ne plus se rouvrir. (*JS*, p. 551)

The protagonist desires to be protected by the doors in an isolated space, far from the interruption of the outside world, and to enjoy the sense of security and calmness in solitude. On the thought of pure existence, Proust mentions the charm of not needing to respond:

> [C]'est une chose qui est, comme par la fenêtre le vieux pharmacien absorbé dans un mélange et vivement éclairé par la lampe nous charme aussi parce qu'il est; le babillage incessant du feu est plus agréable que celui de la cuisinière, parce qu'il n'y a pas besoin d'y répondre, mais on a si peu à songer à ce qu'on dit à la cuisinière. (*JS*, p. 320)

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[110] *JS*, p. 130.

Figure 26

Jean-Baptiste Siméon Chardin, *The Turnip Peeler*, 1738, canvas, 45.5 x 36.5 cm, Bayerische Staatsgemäldesammlungen, Munich.

The truth seems to exist in the minimisation of verbal communication, in the simplicity of solitude and quiet company, just as in many of the genre paintings, the human figure is protected in the calmness of a moment, free from stories and social relations. For example, in Chardin's *The Turnip Peeler* (figure 26), as Rosenberg comments, the viewer is drawn to the thought of pure existence, which is closer to truth than other means:

> The painting contains no anecdotal or picturesque elements; nor is there any social comment…The servant (perhaps Chardin's own) is alone, lost in thought; she stares into space. Is she resting? Is she daydreaming? (Rosenberg, *Chardin*, p. 239)

The particular state depicted above in the genre paintings coincides with several characteristics within such a genre of art that draw very close to the idea of primordiality in Merleau-Ponty's terms. As mentioned previously in the section of time where the pure existence denotes the subject as temporality itself that experiences no changes, and in the section of inter-sensory interaction where no distinction exists among senses, a general poetics of genre paintings is presented with a close association with nature and origin. Since what captivates Proust in the genre paintings is precisely the power of the simplicity of being that evades the rational explanation of language, it is difficult to say that, what constantly recurs in Merleau-Ponty as primordiality, closely related to the body before the emergence of language and definition, is of a different nature to that very power of the everyday.

Conclusion

Through admiring genre paintings, the protagonist in Proust's pen, or the embodiment of the young Proust, understands the beauty of ordinary life. The paintings are a mediator for a certain vision that enlightens or resonates with that of Proust. Drawing on the phenomenological framework of Merleau-Ponty, a systematic method is presented in this chapter to understand how such visions work, covering the aspects of light, time, space, and formal and sensory interaction in the particular context of the genre paintings represented by the works of Rembrandt, Chardin, and Vermeer.

In terms of light, as one of the most prominent effects of seventeenth-century genre paintings, chiaroscuro in the masters' works is appreciated by Proust and recreated in his writing with an attention that not only recognises the division between light and dark which is explained by the phenomenological opposition that constructs the basis for perception, but also underlines the dimness of light and the transparency of shadows, a manner particularly belonging to the genre paintings such as the works of Rembrandt as well as Vermeer, underlining the ambiguity of light in chiaroscuro in such paintings that hinges on interdependence instead of mere opposition. Light reflection in genre paintings is observed by Proust through representing its two phenomenological aspects, one as a mediator that indicates an overall organic composition, the other as an independent entity through which light itself becomes solidified. Furthermore, the atmospheric warmness and suppleness of the objects produced by light in these paintings suggests a smooth and rich texture of time in which the actions are slowed down, which points to Proust's preference for the non-

literality of painting that is displayed in his own writing predilections.

With regard to time, Proust's understanding of the charm of genre paintings of Chardin and Rembrandt lies in the repetition of action suggested in the depicted domestic environment, which could be comprehended as a recognition of the transparency of time with superposed layers of moments in Merleau-Ponty's terms. And how the recent past and the impending future are contained in the pregnant present is particularly emphasised in Proust's appreciation of Chardin's still lives. Moreover, the subject as temporality itself as proposed by Merleau-Ponty illustrates Proust's predilection for the pure existence that resonates with Chardin and Vermeer.

Merleau-Ponty's explanation of spatiality and the role of the body sheds light on Proust's sensibility of the spatial structure in Chardin and Vermeer. Proust's underlining description of the opening cut of a structure in the art works, always involves an indication of certain bodily experience in which, as Merleau-Ponty suggests, the space is not perceived through objectified measurement, but is lived by the subject. In a similar way, the liveliness of the tableau foregrounded by the protruding structure in Proust's vision is obtained through the presumed gestures of the body. Another spatial characteristic that Proust dwells on is the juxtaposition that exists both in the objects in Chardin's still lives and in the genre paintings themselves, a notion that links the spatial relationship with temporality that concerns Proust's manner of viewing memories.

Proust attributes great significance to the harmonious relationship in genre paintings. The organic interactions among forms and sensory elements in the art works as well as Proust's own writings range from the agreement in colour, and the blurred

boundary between human and objects, to synesthesia. The experience and the distinction of warm and cold colours in the development of one's perception, the unconventional way of seeing the subject-object relationship and the naturally integrated multi-sensory perceiving experience proposed by Merleau-Ponty respectively illuminate the aesthetic predisposition of Proust towards the idea of formal and sensory interaction and coherence.

Be it the reading of genre paintings as in 'Chardin et Rembrandt', or Proust's own creation of domestic scenes in *Jean Santeuil*, the texts analysed in this chapter converge in nature as the revelations of a vision that underlines certain phenomenological traits. It could be understood that the vision is acquired from the masters if one regards Proust in his early writing period as an apprentice in aesthetics and creativity, while such acquisition is nevertheless the result of a resonance from what is already in the selective appetite of the young Proust. Thanks to Proust, one is able to appreciate the charm of genre paintings represented by Rembrandt, Vermeer and Chardin, and thanks to the phenomenological framework of Merleau-Ponty that covers light, time, space, and synesthesia, one can gain a clearer view of the layers of a vision that treasures the beauty of domestic scenes.

Chapter 2

The World of Vegetation in Proust's Early Writings: Artistic Dialogues with Ruskin, the Pre-Raphaelites, and Impressionists

The natural world of vegetation occupies a fundamental place in Proust's early writings, especially in the descriptions of the sensory experiences of the adolescent protagonist in *Jean Santeuil*, in which the intimate relationship with nature involves a profound devotion to single species or fields of plants, forming a unique and irreplaceable characteristic of the young Proust's aesthetic experience. This chapter, guided by Merleau-Ponty's theory of perception, conducts an enquiry into four phenomenological aspects, namely colour, form, time and space, of Proust's vision revealed in his depictions of the vegetative world including gardens, woods, and valleys. Although Proust's descriptions seem to be derived from his direct observations of nature, it could be argued that, in the above phenomenological aspects, his vision shares the organising and emphasising tendencies with the visual artists active around his period of writing, some of whom seem to have shaped his way of perceiving the natural world through his visits to exhibitions and salons as well as his reading and translating experiences.

Madeleine Lemaire, a close acquaintance of Proust and a hostess of salons where Proust made a frequent appearance, was also an 'auteur de roses' who

excelled in flower depictions in watercolour.[1] Not only was Proust familiar with her works, he also invited her to illustrate his first book *Les Plaisirs et les Jours*.[2] Paul César Helleu, introduced to Proust by Montesquiou, was another intimate friend, who was frequented by the young Proust during his stay in Normandy.[3] Maintaining a lifelong friendship with Proust, Helleu offered him his work as a gift, and he also drew a portrait of Proust on his death bed.[4] These two artists play prominent roles in the *Recherche*, with the former known as the model for Mme Verdurin,[5] and the latter having inspired the name of the painter Elstir.[6] However, it remains intriguing to discover what drew Proust close to these artists even before the *Recherche*. From a stylistic perspective, there is much in their works – which Proust may or may not have seen – that shares a common vision with the author.

As pointed out by numerous scholars, Impressionism had an undeniable impact on Proust's writing, especially manifest in the *Recherche*. In fact, as early as the end of the nineteenth century when the movement emerged, the young Proust already started to discover the Impressionist works in the 'salons mondains' and exhibitions held by art dealers such as Durand-Ruel and Bernheim, and he also admired the works of Impressionists such as Jean-Baptiste-Camille Corot, Claude Monet and Pierre-Auguste Renoir in the collections of his friends including the

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[1] Yoshikawa, *Proust et l'art pictural*, p. 216.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Ibid., p. 206.

[4] Ibid., pp. 207-10.

[5] Ibid., p. 216.

[6] Ibid., p. 209.

princess Edmond de Polignac and Charles Ephrussi.[7] As Yoshikawa suggests, although he did not overtly advocate their works as Zola did, it can be discerned that a possible assimilation of the characteristics of some of the Impressionists already exists in Proust's early writings, notably as regards Monet's treatment of colour, time and space.[8]

John Ruskin undoubtedly remains a crucial figure for the young Proust, who came in contact with the art critic's writings as early as the 1890s through a course taught by Paul Desjardins.[9] The young Proust was not only familiar with Ruskin's elaborate discourse on artists and nature, he might also have experienced how a vision enables Ruskin to become 'un peintre qui écrit'.[10] Although Proust may not have seen Ruskin's studies and watercolours of nature, in describing plants and gardens, he demonstrates a painterly gaze strikingly similar to that of the artist and art critic whom he so passionately admired as a young man.

As Marion Schmid points out, during Proust's translation of Ruskin's *The Bible of Amiens* and *Sesame and Lillies*, he was informed of the Pre-Raphaelites on whom Ruskin wrote in 'The Three Colours of Preraphaelitism'.[11] And in 1903, Proust's interest in this movement resulted in an essay entitled 'Dante Gabriel Rossetti et Elizabeth Siddal'.[12] There is no proof of Proust seeing any of the Pre-Raphaelites'

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[7] Tadié, *Marcel Proust: L'Écriture et les arts*, p. 15.

[8] Yoshikawa, *Proust et l'art pictural*, p. 199.

[9] Tsumori, *Proust et le paysage*, p. 104.

[10] Ibid.

[11] Schmid, *Proust dans la décadence*, p. 100.

[12] Ibid., p. 101.

works, yet it is impossible that he remained unware of the stylistic manner of artistic treatment present in the paintings of John Everett Millais or Edward Burne-Jones.

With the help of Merleau-Ponty's theory of perception, this chapter will offer a close observation on how nature's reservoir of colours is explored by Proust with a painter's eye similar to those of Lemaire, Helleu, Monet and the Pre-Raphaelites; how plants undergo an examination on a level of individual particularity close to Ruskin's gaze that blurs the boundary between the subject and the object through bodily experience; how the view of these lives evokes the idealised temporal perception present in Impressionist works; and as the protagonist sees the movements of nature, how he synchronises with them and reincarnates them in expressions similar to painting gestures and techniques such as those utilised by Henri Fantin-Latour; finally, how space unfolds beyond boundaries like in Impressionist works, as he moves through gardens, parks and woods and as his imagination travels through the works of Corot.

I Colour

Proust writes in the *Recherche* that 'le style pour l'écrivain aussi bien que la couleur pour le peintre est une question non de technique mais de vision', attributing fundamental prestige to colour, which according to him is much more in itself a revelation of artistic perception and creativity than a mere tool of expression.[13] To

[13] *RTP*, IV (1989), p. 474.

understand such an attitude, it is necessary to review what Merleau-Ponty suggests in *L'Œil et l'esprit*, where painting assumes an ontological privilege, and colour is further singled out as a fundamental element in painting.[14] As Merleau-Ponty indicates, colour itself is a logos based upon which other elements such as time, motion and form exist.[15] Therefore, it is in colours that 'the very rhythm of our gesture'[16] palpitates and colour as Merleau-Ponty quotes Cézanne, is 'l'endroit où notre cerveau et l'univers se rejoignent'.[17]

For the protagonist of *Jean Santeuil*, the botanical world is a natural reservoir of colour that enlightens his vision. A single colour is often appreciated in itself by the protagonist in the manner that one colour predominates the works of Lemaire and Helleu, and the colour resides in the depth of the bodily memory of the protagonist which is to be resurrected through particular sensory experiences. Similarly, the juxtaposition of two colours in the protagonist's vision exceeds the limitations of the quality of an object and the indicator of depth of field, revealing a unique interaction between them that also exists in the works of Monet. Furthermore, when multiple colours are in view in *Jean Santeuil*, they are regarded as detached entities which demonstrate a certain hardened texture in a Pre-Raphaelite style. And the more complicated mixture of colours in the Impressionist

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[14] Galen A. Johnson, 'Thinking in Color: Merleau-Ponty and Paul Klee', in *Merleau-Ponty: Difference, Materiality, Painting*, ed. by Véronique M. Fóti (New York: Humanity Books, 1996), p. 169.

[15] Ibid.

[16] Michael Haar, 'Painting, Perception, Affectivity', *Merleau-Ponty: Difference, Materiality, Painting*, ed. by Véronique M. Fóti (New York: Humanity Books, 1996), p. 188.

[17] *ŒE*, p. 67.

style is also evident in the description of movements in the natural world in *Jean Santeuil*. In addition, the role of light as highly valued by Proust in *Jean Santeuil* when describing the change of tones leads to the reconsideration of the relationship between light and colour, as well as between colour and object.

1.1 The appreciation of a single colour

1.1.1 Single colour as both a representation and a dimension

Merleau-Ponty suggests two ways of considering colour: from the perspective closely related to the perception of a meaningful world, a colour is not simply an entity on its own, but a 'couleur d'un certain objet';[18] meanwhile in his *L'Œil et l'esprit* he puts notable emphasis on colour itself as detached from, or even superior, to the actual objects, asserting a dimension of its own, which 'crée d'elle-même à elle-même des identités, des différences, une texture, une matérialité, un quelque chose'.[19] The affective power of a particular colour, according to Merleau-Ponty, is naturally embedded in the colour's unique element of movement, as 'chaque couleur agit toujours dans le même sens de sorte qu'on peut lui attribuer une valeur motrice définie', which explains the effort of colour theorists such as Goethe who categorise colours based on their emotive and atmospheric quality.[20] As the moving effect of the colours is realised through the potential movements of the body, Merleau-Ponty therefore suggests, '[i]l faut réapprendre à vivre ces couleurs comme les vit notre

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[18] *PP*, p. 361.

[19] *ŒE*, p. 67.

[20] *PP*, pp. 242-44.

corps', which indicates a gesture not of recognition but of participation, meaning that the subject 'co-naît' and 'se synchronise' with the colour.[21]

In *Jean Santeuil*, the perception of colour itself is often foregrounded in the description of the natural world, especially when the attention of the protagonist dwells extensively on a single colour of a flower. For instance, Jean expresses his affection for a single colour in contemplating the 'boules de neige' at the entrance of a park. He observes:

> Cette douce couleur mauve [...] métamorphosée en molles et fines fleurs, on pouvait la regarder, l'approcher, respirer son odeur, fine comme elle, aux branches du lilas, l'emporter avec soi; les Orientaux n'ont pas pu donner à un vase une couleur plus précieuse. (*JS*, p. 325)

By giving prominence to the colour mauve through considering the flowers only as a result of its metamorphosis, Proust attributes to the colour an identity which is no longer a subordinate quality of an object. The idea of flower recedes to the background. It is the colour that the protagonist appreciates and interacts with, and in an even more metaphorical exaggeration, it is also the colour that possesses the odour that is consistent with its fineness.

In Madeleine Lemaire's *Hydrangeas* (figure 1), where the contours of the flowers are only subtly suggested by the edge of colours instead of by solid lines, the flowing and diluted watercolour effect of the colour mauve produces a misty and moving quality, as if the colour is still in the course of metamorphosis. The existence of colour as a dimension in this work, though foregrounded as in Proust's gesture of pulling it out as the subject of a movement, does not completely drift away from the

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[21] Ibid., pp. 244-45.

notion of the 'couleur d'un objet'[22] like later artistic movements such as Abstract Expressionism that go beyond colour's representational role. It is precisely this degree of single colour appreciation that defines the young Proust's particular phenomenological observations and attitude, which still persists in the *Recherche*, as can be seen in the classic episode of Bergotte's death in front of the 'petit pan de mur jaune' in Vermeer's *Vue de Delft*, which 'était si bien peint qu'il était, si on le regardait seul, comme une précieuse œuvre d'art chinoise, d'une beauté qui se suffirait à elle-même'.[23]

Figure 1

Madeleine Lemaire, *Hydrangeas*[24]

[22] *PP*, p. 361.

[23] *RTP*, III (1988), p. 692.

[24] <http://www.felixr.com/print-on-demand/explore/detail/16933/madeleine-jeanne-lemaire-hydrangeas> [accessed 1 March 2015].

The effect of a single colour on the protagonist is far from a disinterested observation like that of an art critic. What the protagonist undergoes is an intense and concentrated experience, in which he comes to see the colour and desires to 'l'approcher, respirer son odeur' and furthermore 'l'emporter avec soi'.[25] This experience reveals through Jean the young Proust as a sincere adolescent aspiring to embrace some being that he considered as equally important to himself. With Jean opening up all his senses, the colour is seen, breathed in and totally 'taken' into his perception, and is intimately intertwined with him. The protagonist's bodily gestures vividly express how perceiving a colour is realised through 'vivre'[26] the colour in Merleau-Ponty's terms.

1.1.2 Single colour and memory

Figure 2

Paul-César Helleu, *La lionne aux hortensias bleus*.[27]

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[25] *JS*, p. 325.

[26] *PP*, p. 244.

[27] <http://fr.wahooart.com/@@/8YDDT8-Paul-Cesar-Helleu-La-Lionne-avec-hortensias-bleus> [accessed 1 March 2015].

Paul-César Helleu's *La lionne aux hortensias bleus* (figure 2) can serve well as a depiction of the situation that follows the gestures of Proust's protagonist analysed above. The bouquets of hydrangeas after being taken home are now put in a vase on a table to be contemplated. By incorporating a figure in the painting, the work of Helleu literally illustrates the presence of the body in the perception of colour. With regard to the tone of the colours in the painting, the background area including the wall and the table is drenched in faded brown and grey, which brings forward the bright and delicate colour of the flowers as well as the whiteness of the woman's intently gazing visage and her supporting arm on the table. The tonal brightness accentuates the dialogue between the body and the colour, of which the blue hue of the hydrangeas, although light, is attributed with the highest saturation of the whole tableau. Such a colour contrast is unlikely to depict the woman as contemplating a familiar object, with her gaze, and possibly the gaze of the viewer, deeply captivated by the colour of the flower.

In the previously quoted paragraph, Proust considers the colour of the hydrangeas as the culmination of the effort of 'les Orientaux'.[28] By underlining an air of elsewhere in the Japanese flower frequently depicted in *ukiyo-e* (woodblock prints), an Oriental art genre that remarkably inspired the Impressionists, he recognises a similar delight in welcoming a novel colour sensation to that expressed in Helleu's work. Such a pleasure results from a process similar to what Merleau-Ponty characterises as 'un changement de structure de la conscience' in the first

[28] *JS*, p. 325.

experience of colour as mentioned in Chapter 1, which signifies 'l'établissement d'une nouvelle dimension de l'expérience, le déploiement d'un a priori'.[29] And henceforth as Merleau-Ponty suggests, the body works as a 'dépositaire' of sensory experience, namely where the memories of the senses are inscribed.[30] Such memories, different from the memories of the mind, are free from the relations of the logic and are manifest in the instinctive reaction to sensory stimulations. On a more fundamental level, sensory experiences would be impossible without such bodily memory, as Merleau-Ponty points out: 'qualité, lumière, couleur, profondeur, qui sont là-bas devant nous, n'y sont que parce qu'elles éveillent un echo dans notre corps, parce qu'il leur fait accueil'.[31] Proust brings forth a particular aesthetic pleasure in seeing a colour that correlates with an awakening recognition in the bodily memory, as he describes how Jean reacts to the blossoming apple trees in Illiers:

> Tout d'un coup, en apercevant la bonne feuille sur laquelle personne ne peut nous donner le change, les fleurs plus larges, plus unies en bouquets blancs qui cheminent tout le long de l'espalier, séparées par les bouquets roses de boutons, nous avons senti dans ces feuilles, dans ces bonnes fleurs blanches quelque chose qui nous parlait, comme quand nous rencontrons dans un défilé une personne aimée qui nous sourit, nous fait bonjour. (*JS*, p. 279)

The white of the apple blossoms not only arises from the colours of the leaves and the pink blossoms, but also seems to contain a message for the protagonist, conveying an unexplainable familiarity as in a greeting smile of a loved friend. The

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[29] *PP*, p. 38.

[30] *ŒE*, p. 58.

[31] Ibid., p. 22.

pleasure of encountering the seemingly familiar colour results from an echo in the body, the depositary of the senses in Merleau-Ponty's terms. Such an echo undergoes an elaborate rumination in the preface of *Contre Sainte-Beuve*, where the young Proust terms it a 'résurrection' that brings up past moments through sensory experiences with the objects where 'l'intelligence n'a pas cherché à les incarner',[32] which he later develops into one of the central aesthetic credos of the *Recherche*.

1.2 Interaction of two colours

In *Jean Santeuil*, Proust is not only devoted to the impassioned depiction of one colour, but also equally attentive to the composition of two different colours in his 'word paintings'. The emphasis on the juxtaposition of two colours recurs frequently in *Jean Santeuil* and its particularities are worth further examination from the perspective of perception.

The dynamics between two colours stimulated discussions from as early as the Renaissance when Leon Battista Alberti underlined the 'certain friendship of colours' that gives their juxtaposition an effect of 'dignity and grace'.[33] The reason for the interaction between colours, according to Merleau-Ponty, is less an ideal relationship of clearly defined colours, but more the result of the particularity of perception that varies according to different contexts. As 'la pure impression' is

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[32] *CSB*, p. 213.

[33] David Bomford, 'The History of Colour in Art', in *Colour: Art & Science*, ed. by Trevor Lamb and Janine Bourriau (Cambridge: Cambridge U Press, 1995), p. 14.

'imperceptible' and 'impensable comme moment de la perception',[34] he suggests, the perception of a particular sensory quality such as colour, will always involve the articulation of 'l'ensemble du champ'.[35] This relationship is manifest in the recognition of a certain colour which always depends on its surroundings.[36] One cannot exclude the existence of other fields of vision when considering colours, since it is according to the interaction among different fields that the final visual effect is constituted, which explains the so-called 'simultaneous color contrast' pointed out by Harald Küppers and the results of a colour perception experiment carried out by Josef Albers.[37]

In *Jean Santeuil*, the significance of 'l'ensemble du champ' is reflected in the relationship between two juxtaposed colours in contrast,[38] like the opposition of light and dark of chiaroscuro analysed in Chapter 1, whereas when describing the contrast between the flowers and their leaves, Proust presents pairs of colours that are less interchangeable in their effect as in the ambiguous relationship of light and dark mentioned by Bal.[39] For example, Proust is exceptionally observant of the leaves of the lilac when he describes the flower in Jean's grandfather's garden, which is

> inclinée au-dessus des feuilles qui l'entourent, comme un ornement répété à l'infini, comme des compagnes moins belles, sans couleurs personnelles et

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[34] *PP*, p. 10.

[35] Ibid., p. 355.

[36] Ibid.

[37] See Harald Küppers, *Color: Origin, Systems, Uses*, trans. by F. Bradley (London: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1972), p.38, and Josef Albers, 'Color Juxtaposition — Harmony — Quantity', in *Interaction of Color* (New Haven: Yale U Press, 2013), pp. 39-44.

[38] *PP*, p. 355.

[39] Bal, *The Mottled Screen*, p. 28.

> sans parfum, mais qui entretiennent autour d'elle une agréable fraîcheur. (*JS*, p. 323)

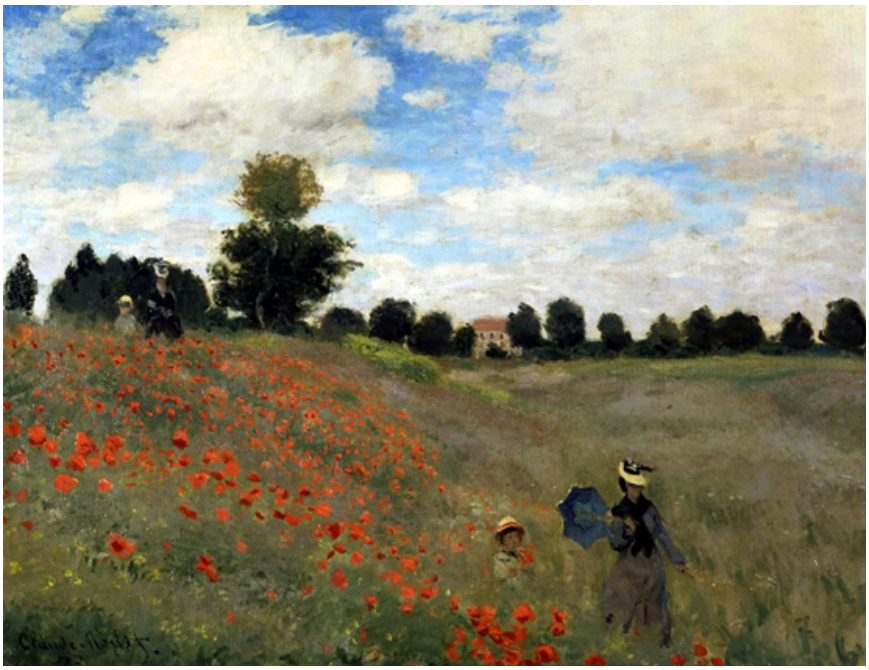

Figure 3

Claude Monet, *Les coquelicots*, 1873, canvas, 50 x 65 cm, Musée d'Orsay, Paris.

The awareness of the interaction between colours can be seen even without any direct mention of the actual colour of the leaves. The weight of the local colours being lifted, the colour of the leaves is first depicted in its immense quantity, and the leaves are further underlined as 'sans couleurs personnelles',[40] indicating a perceived effect of the colour combination where the colour of the flowers is pronounced. A similar way of seeing the colour relationship of the flowers and the leaves can be observed in Monet's *Les coquelicots* (figure 3), where the green of the leaves and

[40] *JS*, p. 323.

Figure 4

Claude Monet, *Iris Jaune et Mauve*, 1924, canvas, 106 x 155 cm, Musée Marmottan, Paris.

Figure 5

Claude Monet, *Les Roses*, 1925-1926, canvas, 130 x 200 cm, Musée Marmottan, Paris.

grass field forms a similar complementary colour zone 'à l'infini' while remaining in a darker tone that verges on the illusion of invisibility.[41] The flaming red hue of the poppies would hardly achieve such a brightness but for the presence of the accompanying colour. Through emphasising the particularity of perceiving the juxtaposition of the colours of the flower and the leaves despite their commonly considered 'actual' quality, Proust and Monet successfully tone down the existence of green.

Different from the treatment of green in the double-colour composition, the colour blue of the sky and the sea undergoes an accentuation in relation to the colour of the flowers. For example, when Proust describes the appearance of the hydrangeas as previously quoted, he notes that the colour of the flowers 'se montre à nous mais dans le ciel entre les branches',[42] and in Beg-meil the protagonist sees 'les pommiers qui laissent voir la mer entre leurs branches'.[43] By intentionally introducing the sky and the sea into his 'word paintings' of flowers, Proust brings forward the blue to an equal, almost more marked, presence to the colour of the flowers. A comparable intention exists in Monet's *Iris Jaune et Mauve* (figure 4). It is not difficult to note in this work that the artist adopts a peculiar angle of observation — one unusually close to the ground, in order to allow the blue of the sky to enter the gaps between the stems of the irises. And in *The Rose Bush* (figure 5), the blue of the sky gains so much of a presence that it transcends the role of a background

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[41] Ibid.

[42] *JS*, p. 325.

[43] Ibid., p. 362.

through a juxtaposition with the pink of the roses and the green of the leaves. The texture and the materiality of the blue is accentuated to the extent that it seems to be painted after, if not simultaneously with, the tree, since the blue paint occasionally covers that of the latter, just as in Proust's text, the blue is 'entre', instead of behind, the branches.[44]

1.3 Multiple detached colours

To illustrate the materiality manifest in colour composition such as the pronounced existence of blue analysed above, Merleau-Ponty suggests a painterly gesture of perceiving multiple colours, which is 'clign[er] les yeux', allowing the colours to stand out by themselves.[45] At this moment, the viewer is no longer aware of the function of the colours to indicate light, shape or distance, and similar to the single colour perception, he/she see colours as 'dimensions' and independent 'identités'.[46] When Proust's vision of the botanical world comes to include more colours at the same time, his descriptions convey an attention to each colour that highlights its individuality and intensity, which precisely foregrounds such a dimension and identity. For instance, in describing the garden at Illiers in the morning, Proust presents through the vision of Jean a variety of flowers:

> toutes les fleurs, en rang comme les myosotis ou enlacées comme les pois de senteurs, semblant descendre du ciel à la suite des reflets du soleil en se laissant glisser le long du trillage par le mur du jardin, les fleurs semblaient comme les innombrables anges d'une sorte de Jour, comme ceux qu'ont

[44] Ibid., p. 325.

[45] *PP*, p. 354.

[46] *ŒE*, p. 67.

> représentés les grand peintres de la Renaissance, des anges peints d'un rose, d'un bleu, d'un orangé aussi vifs. (*JS*, p. 298)

Mentioning altogether six flowers in the paragraph, Proust depicts a tableau of flowers in the sunlight in colours that are 'vi[ves]', namely highly saturated, and the simile of the Renaissance painting conveys the distinctiveness of these colours from each other.[47] The treatment of the clothes of mythological and religious figures such as the angels and Mary in Renaissance paintings and further back in medieval art often embraces a pure and intense colour use, comparable to how Proust accentuates the brightness of the flower colour in another garden in *Jean Santeuil* where 's'échappait perpétuellement le charme violent des fleurs'.[48] In addition, the brilliant colours in medieval and Renaissance art are often arranged as entities detached from one another, different in quality and distant in position, as in Proust's depiction 'd'un rose, d'un bleu'.[49]

Figure 6

Sir John Everett Millais, *Ophelia*, 1851–2, canvas, 76.2 x 11.18 cm, Tate, London.

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[47] *JS*, p. 298.

[48] Ibid., p. 327.

[49] Ibid., p. 298.

Figure 7

Edward Coley Burne-Jones, *The Prioress's Tale*, 1865-1898, gouache on paper on linen support, 104 x 63 cm, Delaware Art Museum, Wilmington.

In this regard, Proust's vision bears a strong resemblance to the Pre-Raphaelite artists' aesthetic and technical decisions. In a rebellion against the ponderous dark tone of the works eulogised by the Royal Academy of Arts in London under the direction of Joshua Reynolds, the Pre-Raphaelite artists acquired from the Italian fresco masters such as Giotto and Fra Angelico the 'flat, clear colours' in their works, which are achieved through a revitalisation of the painting method on wet white platers by utilising a layer of wet white paint as a substitute before thinly

applying colours in brilliant hues.[50] Such an effect also reflects the aesthetic of the pure colours within the neat drawings in Japanese *ukiyo-e* that equally influenced the Pre-Raphaelites. In Sir John Everett Millais' *Ophelia* (figure 6), the flowers floating around Ophelia's hand almost reincarnate the distribution of colours in a Renaissance tableau. The red of the poppies, the bright yellow of the daffodils and the purple of the irises are highly saturated to the extent of what Proust underlines in the description of the garden as being 'violent'. And with each of them arranged in an independent position detached from other colours, they reach a static state of concreteness. More evidently in Edward Burne-Jones's *The Prioress's Tale* (figure 7), the 'unusually bright and vivid tones' of the lilies, the poppies and the sunflowers as pointed out by John Christian are presented with an almost decorative inclination that verges on the effect of a medieval tapestry, as Burne-Jones himself considers the colours as 'com[ing] at intervals like those in a tune'.[51] In both works as well as in Proust's texts which are non-decorative depictions of the natural world, the function of colour as an indication of light and depth of field are nonetheless temporarily omitted. In this manner, the colours standing out from one another are rendered pure, direct, and solidified. The flat, hardened texture of the colours continues to be one of Proust's aesthetic preferences in the *Recherche*. Anne Simon's defines such a

[50] Rachel Barnes, *The Pre-Raphaelites and their World* (London: Tate Publishing, 1998), p. 12.

[51] John Christian, Edward Burne-Jones, *Victorian Artist-dreamer*, ed. by Stephen Wildman and John Christian (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1998), p. 130.

mode of colour comprehension as 'le durcissement' which 'ne marque pas la profondeur' but rather indicates 'la présence, par son caractère sécurisant'.[52]

1.4 Impressionistic mixture of colours

With regard to the relationship between colour and object, Merleau-Ponty points out that

> le préjugé est de croire qu'il s'agit là de différents arrangements d'une perception de la couleur en elle-même invariable, de différentes formes données à une même matière sensible. (*PP*, p. 353)

Therefore, the colour perception of one object is not unique and singular, and what is commonly believed as the fixed local colour of an object is no more than one example of the various different perceptions that change according to lighting and neighbouring colours. Such a phenomenon is reflected in certain of Proust's depictions of the natural world where colours are no longer seen as distinct and solidified fixed areas of a painting as mentioned in the previous section, but are intentionally mixed to underline their changing quality, drawing close to an Impressionist manner. For instance, an autumn afternoon in the garden of the Oublis is described as such:

> Vers quatre heures du soir, le soleil couchant à ce qui restait des feuillages automnaux présentait de riches palettes rouge, vert, jaune et or, en tirait des effets magiques: une sorte d'aurore se peignait dans le ciel bleu et rose sous les feuilles lumineuses et fantastiques. On marchait en sentant à chaque pas les effets changer, s'exalter, s'attendrir. (*JS*, p. 308)

[52] Simon, *Proust ou le réel retrouvé*, p. 174.

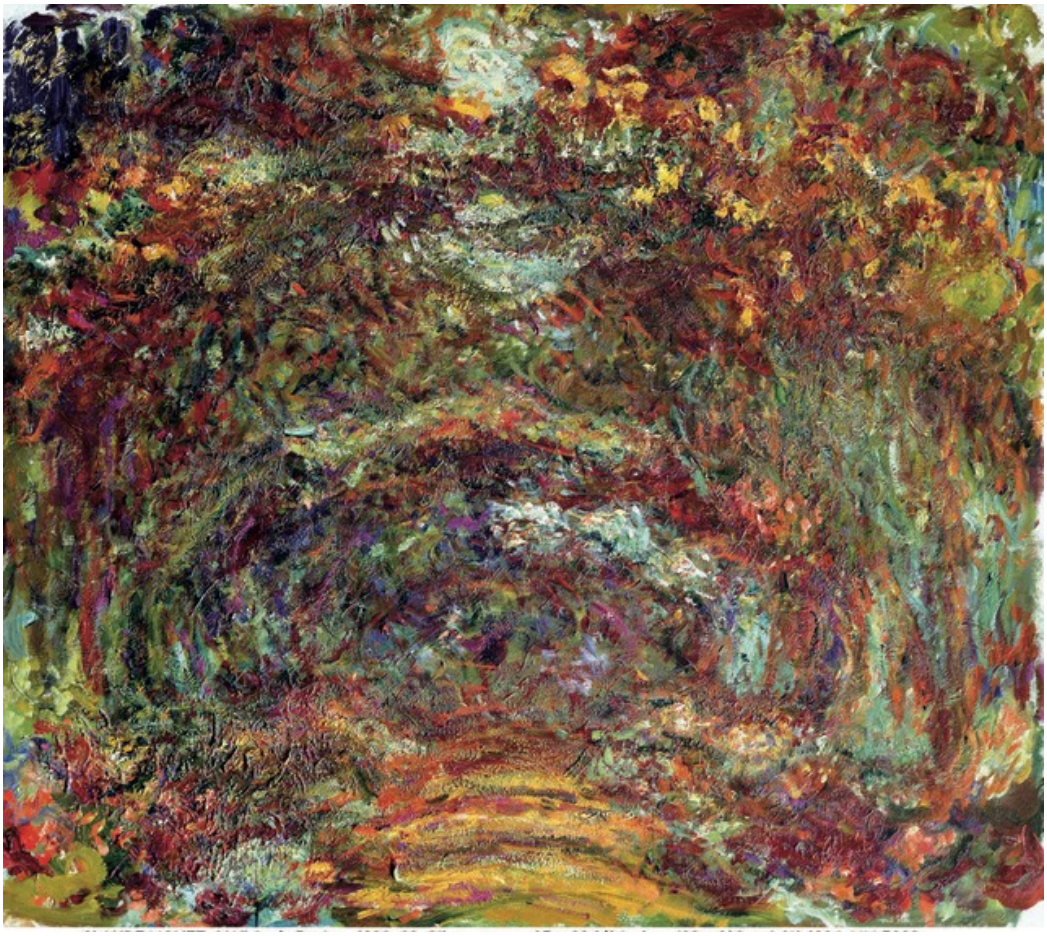

Figure 8

Claude Monet, *L'allée des rosiers*, 1920-1922, canvas, 88.9 × 100.3 cm, Musée Marmottan Monet, Paris.

Here, the colours are no longer presented as the angel-like clusters — 'd'un rose, d'un bleu, d'un orangé',[53] but in a rich palette that simultaneously mixes 'rouge, vert, jaune et or' into a kind of 'aurore'.[54] Colours here are not intensified and hardened but are airy and mercurial, the effect of which suggests movement and change.

Monet's *L'allée des rosiers, Giverny* (figure 8) contains no less fantastic elements

[53] *JS*, p. 298.

[54] Ibid., p. 308.

than those mentioned in Proust's text. Strokes of red, green, orange and bright yellow are interlaced in an endless pattern. On the one hand, their simultaneous presence evokes a mixing process in the viewer's eye that combines the crude colours on the canvas into an atmospheric harmony, as in Proust's word 'une sorte d'aurore' that refers to a rich overall effect other than a simple colour;[55] on the other hand, because of the phenomenon pointed out by Gombrich that when

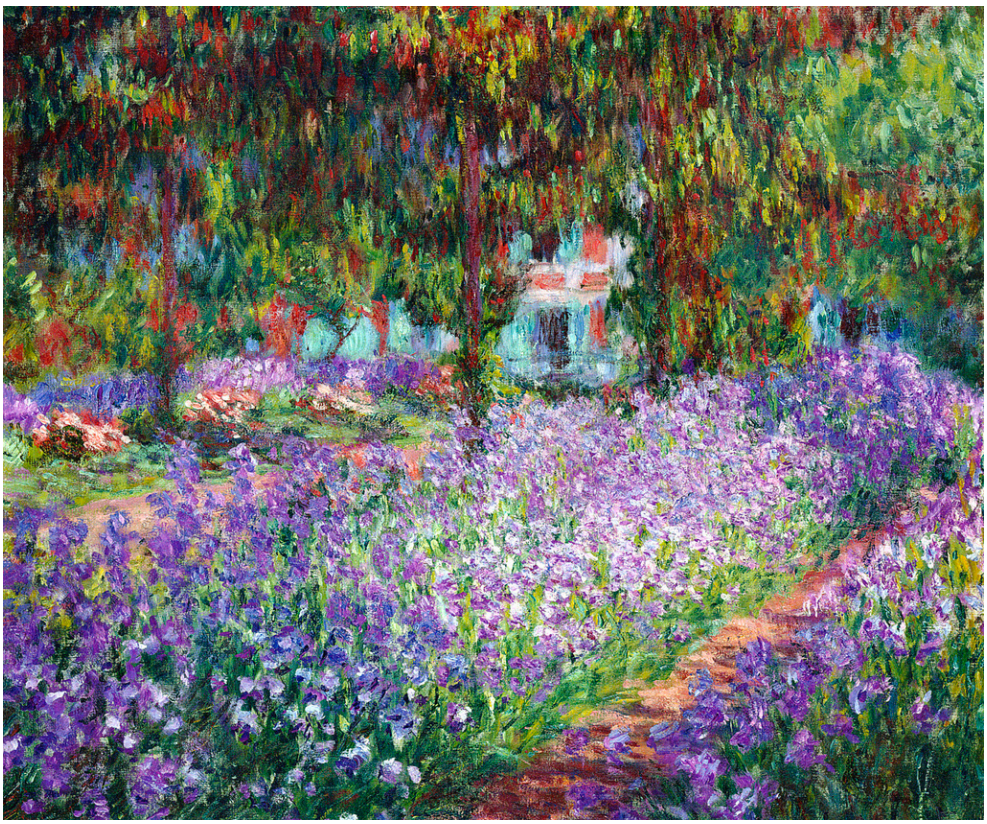

Figure 9

Claude Monet, *Le jardin de l'artiste à Giverny*, 1900, canvas, 81.6 x 92.6 cm, Musée d'Orsay, Paris.

[55] Ibid.

perceiving a painting, one's eye 'scan[s] backward and forward in time and space',[56] the complicated colour strokes in Monet's work cause a tendency of frequent bodily movement in the viewer and therefore realise a perception that embodies the vibrant quality, depicted by Proust as the change 'à chaque pas'.[57]

The role that colours play in Monet's paintings of the gardens, for example, in *Le jardin de l'artiste à Giverny* (figure 9) is commented by Haddad as producing an effect that 'touche au désassujettissement'.[58] A rich palette applied in innumerable loose and quick brushstrokes foregrounds the harmony and the enthralling changes of colours, reflecting a vision that almost ignores the subject being painted. In other words, the subject of the work, instead of being the rose bush and the crowd of irises, is colour itself. Here the identity and the dimension of colour suggested by Merleau-Ponty are as equally pronounced as is analysed in previous sections of single and multiple detached colours. The young Proust recognises such an effect in Monet by calling his garden in Giverny 'jardin-coloriste' in the article 'Les Éblouissements'.[59] Proust is indeed not mistaken on this, since Monet, who claims 'mon chef d'oeuvre, c'est mon jardin',[60] carefully plans out the arrangement of flower beds in the garden to achieve the satisfactory composition of colour.[61]

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[56] E. H. Gombrich, *The Image and the Eye* (London: Phaidon, 1994), p. 50.

[57] *JS*, p. 308.

[58] Hubert Haddad, *Le Jardin des peintres* (Vanves: Hazan, 2000), p. 132.

[59] *CSB*, p. 533.

[60] Fabrice Moireau, *Le Jardin de Claude Monet à Giverny* (Paris: Gallimard, 2006), p. 26.

[61] Noémie Goldman, *Claude Monet: Son musée* (Vanves: Hazan, 2010), p. 135.

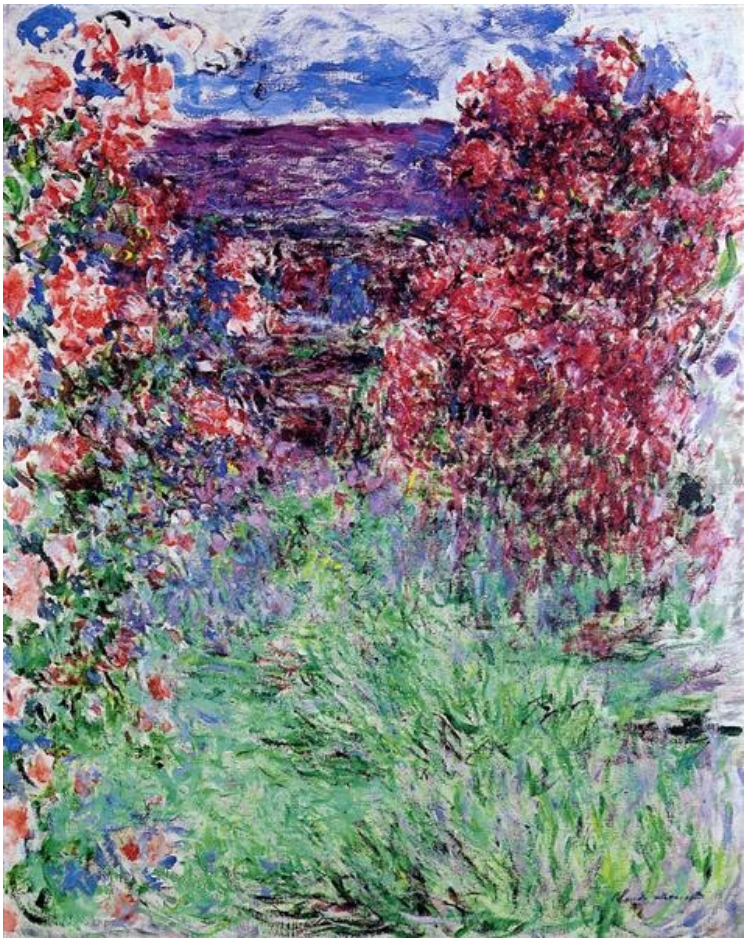

Figure 10

Claude Monet, *The House among the Roses*, 1925, canvas, 92.3 × 73.3 cm, Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid.

Having never paid any visit to the garden, Proust derives from Monet's paintings a vision of a garden which consists 'de tons et de couleurs plus encore que de fleurs', where 'les nuances s'assortissent, s'harmonisent à l'infini en une étendue bleue ou rosée'.[62] As in works like *Le jardin de l'artiste à Giverny* (figure 9) and *The House among the Roses* (figure 10), the colours of purple and green presented in a great variation, interplay and recurrence serve well as examples of Proust's evocation of

[62] *CSB*, p. 539.

the effect of 'bleue ou rosée'. This reflects a powerful vision in which the flowers, according to Proust, are 'dématérialisées, en quelque sorte, de tout ce qui n'est pas la couleur'.[63] It is true that in praising the quality in Monet that would later inspire schools of abstract painting, Proust recognises a Modernist tendency of underlining the independence of colour from representation. However, as previously mentioned on the perception of a single colour, Proust's appreciation of the expressiveness of colour in Monet never moves away from the nature being depicted; it is worth noting that what draws his attention to such a vision is the power of 'dématérialis[er]', namely a process of perception that accentuates the presence of colours while still maintaining their bond with the world.[64]

1.5 Light and colour

As mentioned in the analysis of chiaroscuro in Chapter 1, according to Merleau-Ponty, colour forms an inseparable pair with light, with 'le reflet, la couleur ardente, la couleur rayonnante' all being the forms of light embedded in colour, or, in other words, the forms of colour generated by light.[65] The fundamental role of light for colour in Proust, as observed by Simon, consists in the fact that the objects are presented as 'coloré[s]',[66] namely, colours in Proust are the result of a dynamic process:

> [L]a couleur naît de la relation entre l'objet et la lumière, que le sujet saisit en

[63] Ibid., p. 540.

[64] Ibid.

[65] *PP*, p. 353.

[66] Simon, *Proust ou le réel retrouvé*, p. 171.

> acte. La couleur n'appartient en tant que telle ni à l'un ni à l'autre, n'étant pas une qualité positive mais la réfraction de leur rencontre. (Simon, *Proust ou le réel retrouvé*, p. 171)

The young Proust's recognition of such an encounter is not only manifest in the narrator's symbolically calling the sun 'Dieu le Père',[67] that is, the source of all visual perceptions; Proust's early consideration of light is also evident in the depiction of how sunlight travels in a continuous reflection in the garden in Illiers:

> Voilà le royaume heureux vers lequel les reflets du soleil, faisant du ciel au jardin, du jardin à notre fenêtre, de notre fenêtre à notre lit une échelle heureuse. (*JS*, p. 299)

Proust's depiction here is as much a capture of the existence of light as an observation of the genesis of colours of the sky and the gardens. At the same time, as 'une échelle heureuse', the reflection of sunlight unites the different places in the description, as the function of light in a painting through the determination of the overall tonal effect of colours.[68] This is more clearly shown in Jean's experience in the pine tree wood near the mansion of the Duchess Réveillon:

> Les bois, les vignes, les pierres elles-mêmes s'étaient harmonisés avec la lumière du soleil et la pureté du ciel, et quand le ciel se voilait, comme par un changement de ton, la multitude des feuilles, la terre des chemins, les toits de la ville, tout restait uni dans un monde nouveau. (*JS*, p. 492)

Here, with words, Proust paints two paintings of the same landscape, the only difference between which is light. With the details of the objects in both paintings missing, what Proust seeks to foreground is made all the more evident — on the one hand, before and after the veiling of the sky, the woods, the ground and other

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[67] *JS*, p. 299.

[68] Ibid.

Figure 11

Claude Monet, *Water Lilies and Japanese Bridge*, 1899, canvas, 90.5 x 89.7 cm, Princeton University Art Museum, Princeton.

Figure 12

Claude Monet, *Bridge over a Pond of Water Lilies*, 1899, canvas, 92.7 x 73.7 cm, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

objects in the 'word painting' are either 'harmonisés' or 'uni[s]' with one another; on the other hand, precisely due to the harmony of the tableau, the change of light alters all the colours in the composition, and in this manner, through 'un changement de ton', it generates 'un monde nouveau'. These two aspects in Proust's perception of the interaction between light and colour are almost a summary of what the Impressionists strive to achieve in their use of colour to reflect ever-changing light. Monet uses the term 'enveloppe' to describe the internal connections of colours in a painting, and as Bridget Riley suggests, the choice of a certain envelope is determined by the 'changing light, its shadows and reflections'.[69] For instance, *Water Lilies and the Japanese Bridge* (figure 11) employs a compatible pair of pale fresh yellow and light blue-violet to depict the light and shade in the morning sun, whereas a complete 'changement de ton',[70] in Proust's words, is created in *Bridge over Water Lilies* (figure 12) by the 'uni'[71] of respectively the creamy white and the palest bluish grey that reflect the mid-day sunlight.[72]

[69] Bridget Riley, 'Colour for the Painter', *Colour: Art & Science*, ed. by Trevor Lamb and Janine Bourriau (Cambride: Cambridge U Press, 1995), p. 56.

[70] *JS*, p. 492.

[71] Ibid.

[72] Riley, 'Colour for the Painter', pp. 56-57.

II The devotion to specific botanic forms

The phenomenology of perception based on the interlaced relationship between the body and the world puts Merleau-Ponty on a philosophical ground that reconciles the prolonged historical disagreement on the priority between matter and idea. Pointing out the weakness of the Kantian notion that insists on the systematic idealisation of human knowledge, he proposes an attitude that attends to every phenomenological particularity of perception, which explains his appreciation of Cézanne, who, on the relationship between the artist and nature, comments that

> il faut se plier à ce parfait ouvrage [la nature]. De lui tout nous vient, par lui, nous existons, oublions tout le reste.[73]

Such a remark bears a strong resemblance to Ruskin's well-known assertion in *Modern Painters* that became the credo for the Pre-Raphaelites — 'go to nature trustingly, rejecting nothing, and selecting nothing'.[74] With this belief, Ruskin studies the plants in nature with an extraordinary concentration that equals a sort of scientific scrutiny, which can be witnessed in the studies such as *Silver - Weed - Flower and Bud Studies* (figure 13) that painstakingly record the details of the specific traits of a species. However, his reverent posture towards the beauty of nature leads him to prioritise the aesthetic value of the plants without disrespecting their biological properties, as he suggests,

> flowers and vegetation were no wise antagonistic to the theories which Mr. Darwin's unwearied and unerring investigations are every day rendering more

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[73] Merleau-Ponty, *Sens*, p. 21.

[74] John Ruskin, *Modern Painters*, I, (Sunnyside; Orpington; Kent: George Allen, 1888), p. 419.

probable. The aesthetic relations of species are independent of their origin.[75]

Figure 13

John Ruskin, *Silver - Weed - Flower and Bud Studies*, ink and wash on paper, 12.5 x 11.4 cm, The Ruskin Library and Research Centre of Lancaster University, Lancaster.

'The aesthetic relations' that draw the attention of Ruskin who establishes the 'religion de la beauté', are without a doubt an equally seminal aspect for the vision of the young Proust, who was still a feverish admirer of Ruskin when writing *Jean Santeuil*.[76] Proust's preference for the purity of natural material and the environment pervades this early, unfinished work. For example, the narrator celebrates the vibrancy of a garden when scenting the fragrance of the living leaves,

[75] Christopher Newell, Christopher Baker, Ian Jeffrey and Conal Shields, *John Ruskin: Artist and Observer* (London: P. Holberton, 2014), p. 330.

[76] Robert de La Sizeranne, *Ruskin et la religion de la beauté* (Paris: Hachette, 1897).

which is much more intense and more profound than the artificially processed products:

> Même de loin devant cette grille on sentait, combien plus pénétrante ainsi cueillie à la feuille vivante par le vent qui les berçait, les rapprochait, les composait, les étendait, les concentrait tour à tour, qu'au fumet d'une tisane ou dans la chambre d'une pharmacie, l'odeur des tilleuls et des acacias. (*JS*, p. 327)

It is in moments like this that the protagonist revels in his intimacy with nature with an almost naïve sincerity. The pure contact recounted without excessive reasoning can be viewed through Merleau-Ponty's ideas on identity and subjectivity in perception. In respect of identifying forms in nature in *Jean Santeuil*, Proust highlights the particularity of natural life, the personification of plants and the identification with the plants in solitude, an attitude which converges with the visions of artists such as Ruskin and Watteau.

2.1 Individuality of plants

What distinguishes Ruskin from a scientist resides in his observation that reaches beyond the limit of the botanical genre. He stresses the importance of the particularity of plants and advises others to

> [think] of each specimen as having an individuality in terms of its own peculiar traits and predispositions, as well as characteristics determined by the circumstances of its immediate environment and history.[77]

Through focusing on the 'peculiar traits' of an individual plant, Ruskin maintains a vision which contains more scientific scrutiny than that of the old school landscape

[77] Newell, *John Ruskin: Artist and Observer*, p. 324.

painters, and which involves more poetic temperament than that of a scientist. In *Jean Santeuil*, similarly, Proust often dwells lengthily on a specific plant, attributing to it a heightened sense of individuality. For example, when the young protagonist Jean contemplates an apple tree, he confesses that

> [i]l nous semble que sous le vernis vert de la feuille et sous le satin blanc de la fleur il y ait comme un être particulier, un individu que nous aimons et que personne ne peut nous remplacer. (*JS*, p. 279)

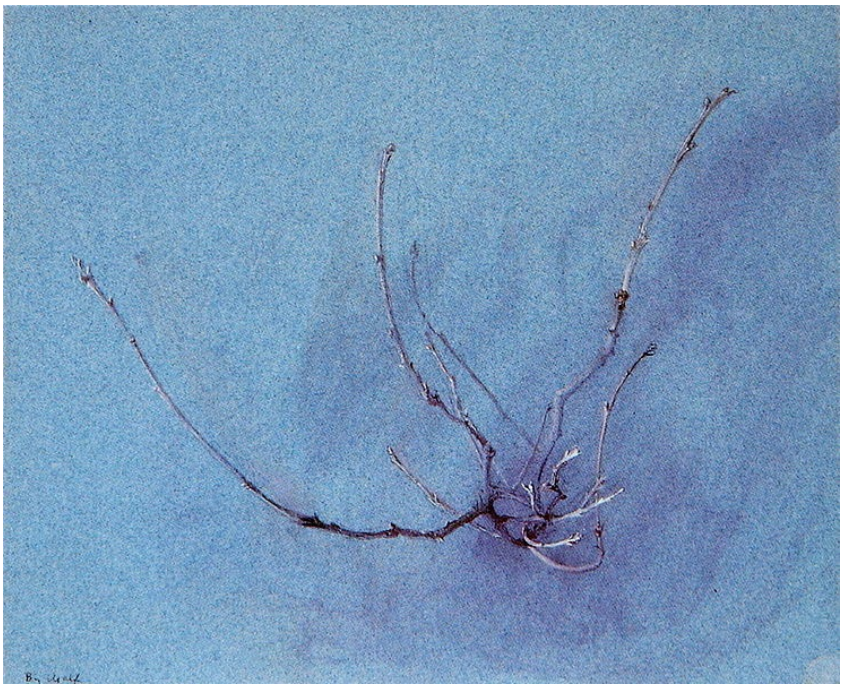

Figure 14

John Ruskin, *The Dryad's Waywardness: Oak Spray in Winter, Seen in Front*, 1860, watercolour and bodycolour over graphite on blue wove paper, 22.0 x 26.7 cm, Ashmolean Museum, Oxford.

Through identifying in the apple tree 'un être particulier', Proust creates a situation where his protagonist is put into a direct contact with the particularity of the individual plant in its particular environment, and associates it with a profundity of existence that is often absent in the works of the old school artists such as Gaspard

Poussin or Claude Lorrain, who were lambasted by Ruskin for the lack of a sincere observation of the details in nature by dismissing the plants as decoration or background. In situations like this, the protagonist establishes an intimate relationship with the plant, which does not tolerate any generalisation into botanic genres. For example, Proust's narrator thus comments on Jean's attitude towards nature:

> D'autant plus que pour Jean les choses n'étaient pas encore l'une de beaucoup de choses du même genre, mais des personnes dont l'équivalent n'existait pas. Il ne se disait pas qu'il y avait dans le canal des cygnes mais 'les' cygnes, et dans le terrain un camélia mais 'le' camélia, qui étaient des choses probablement aussi uniques en leur genre. (*JS*, p. 334)

Calling a camellia 'le camélia', Jean treats a particular plant as a unique individual to which no 'équivalent' could be found. Such an approach is comparable to the manner in which a painter attends to the temporal and the spatial details of the particular vision of a plant. The works of Ruskin serve as excellent examples of such a vision. For instance, in *The Dryad's Waywardness: Oak Spray in Winter, seen in Front* (figure 14), an affectionate and concentrated gaze caresses every twig and every burgeon, with the scrupulous treatment of the light and the shadow, the particular colour and texture of the plant that belong to the particular time and season, almost invoking a brisk air of winter surrounding the plant. Such is the extent to which an oak spray could be called 'the oak spray', as the particular visual effect that Proust emphasises in his writing.

2.2 Personification

2.2.1 Plant portraits

The meticulous depiction seen in *The Dryad's Waywardness: Oak Spray in Winter, seen in Front* aptly exemplifies Ruskin's evocation in *Modern Painters* of the 'tree portraits' produced by truthful observers of nature.[78] Associating art works depicting plants with figure portraits is not a rare gesture in *Jean Santeuil* either. Apart from referring to the angels in Renaissance paintings in his description of the roadside flowers as previously mentioned, Proust compares the captivation of a rose bush to that exuded in a work by Van Dyck:

> Il y a des moments de la vie où devant un tableau de Van Dyck, nous sentons qu'il n'y a rien de plus délicieux à aimer. D'autres fois c'est devant un rosier blanc. (*JS*, p. 472)

As a master well-known for his historical paintings and portraits for the English royal family, Van Dyck is deeply appreciated by the young Proust for his delicate portraits, some of which are evoked in the poem 'Portraits de peintres' from *Les Plaisirs et les jours* dedicated to the masters of the Louvre.[79] In the quotation above, 'un tableau de Van Dyck' is therefore likely to refer to a portrait.[80] In this way, by bridging two different types of beauty, Proust establishes a profound association between plants in nature and human beings. The commonality of the pleasure and affection the protagonist experiences in looking at both the painting and the rose bush reveals much more than a simple rhetorical device of personification, since behind the

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[78] John Ruskin, *Modern Painters*, I, p. 379.

[79] *JS*, p. 81.

[80] Ibid., p. 472.

endless human associations in plants in *Jean Santeuil*, there is always a look that seeks to understand the resemblance beyond the similarities in appearance. For instance, when Jean asks the gardener about a blossoming tree, and after being told that those in front of him are all hawthorns, he contemplates:

> [I]l y a bien quelque chose, en effet, qui donne l'idée d'une personne, d'une race à part, dans un genre. Chacun de [ces] arbres, sa saison venue, sans se soucier de ses voisins les lilas, sans tenir compte des marronniers, par une sorte d'instinct obscur de génie fixe, montre, le temps venu, rougit, fait éclater, ouvre…. (*JS*, p. 280)

What Jean expresses in his admiration of the rhythm of the life phenomena of a certain plant is on the one hand awe for the laws of nature, and on the other hand an aspiration to seek out the underlying intention that leads to all these phenomena. It is such an understanding of the intention that associates the plant with the idea of 'une personne'.[81]

As in the previously mentioned emphasis on 'l'ensemble du champ', Merleau-Ponty proposes that the phenomenon is always perceived by the grasp of the 'ensemble'.[82] Therefore, a painter's perception of 'une femme' is not simply the appearance of a human figure, but 'l'emblème d'une manière d'habiter le monde'.[83] It is the significance of such a 'manière' that transcends the boundary between humans and nature.[84]

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[81] Ibid., p. 280.

[82] *PP*, p. 355.

[83] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Signes* (Paris: Gallimard, 1960), p. 68.

[84] Ibid.

2.2.2 Personification and subjectivity

The underlying reason for the personification of the natural life mentioned above can be understood as a denial of the notion of subjectivity on the part of the human being. As Merleau-Ponty states,

> La seule manière d'assurer mon accès aux choses mêmes serait de purifier tout à fait ma notion de la subjectivité: il n'y a pas même de 'subjectivité' ou d'Ego', la conscience est sans 'habitant'. (*VI*., p. 77)

The denial of isolated subjectivity is consistent with the fact that the world and the self are essentially synonyms of each other, as Merleau-Ponty explains:

> Le monde est inséparable du sujet, mais d'un sujet qui n'est rien que projet du monde, et le sujet est inséparable du monde, mais d'un monde qu'il projette lui-même. (*PP*, p. 491)

Therefore, from the perspective of an artist, as Merleau-Ponty argues, his/her 'regard', 'enveloppe, palpe, épouse les choses visibles';[85] the converse is true, as Merleau notices the saying that 'la chose nous est donnée "en personne" ou "en chair et en os"'.[86] In Proust's *Jean Santeuil*, such an intertwined relationship allows the protagonist to see the world as palpable and inseparable from himself, making it possible to connect the botanic phenomena to the behaviour of a person. A clear recognition of such a relationship is manifest in Jean's confession of his fondness for the 'épine rose' after referring to M. Montesquiou who initiates him to the beauty of 'la rose mousseuse, le calice de la gentiane cinéraire':

> Mais il y a quelque chose de plus profond en nous qu'une émotion artistique, c'est un peu de nous-même qui, gardé intact et frais dans quelque coin oublié, nous est tout à coup silencieusement offert. (*JS*, p. 332)

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[85] Ibid., p. 175.

[86] *PP*, p. 369.

The ‘émotion artistique’ tends to designate an aesthetic recognition in the domain of art,[87] which indicates a somehow distanced evaluation that isolates what is seen from the one that looks, namely, the so-called ‘sujet’; whereas in Jean’s intimate connection with the flower, such a subject is no longer distinctly present, but merges with the flower, finding ‘un peu de nous-même’ in the rose,[88] thus blurring the boundary between the self and the world.

2.2.3 Personification and perception of young age

Jean’s sentiment invests in a plant the kind of attention usually paid to a human being, revealing a hyper sensitiveness to nature, which, according to Tsumori, might be a manifestation of ‘l’imagination propre à l’enfant’, who cannot yet distinguish between the reality and the fairy tales where plants and objects have human-like characters and behaviours, since the narrator also points out that such a connection belongs particularly to Jean’s young age.[89] However, Merleau-Ponty’s observation of childhood perception may offer a more complex explanation.

As Talia Welsh points out, Merleau-Ponty specifically recognises the perception of the child as a significant manifestation of the relationship between the world and the self. Instead of dismissing childhood experience as a chaotic and fantastical confusion, he sees in the child a coherent perception rooted in the world

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[87] Ibid.

[88] Ibid.

[89] Tsumori, *Proust et le paysage*, p. 115.

without any division among individuals or between people and their environment as imposed by language and logic.[90] It is based on such early experiences that what he calls the primordial and the pre-historical ground are formed.[91] What is present in Proust's early writings on the experiences of a young man demonstrates precisely the valuable traces of such a coherence, to which, later in the *Recherche*, a similar attitude is maintained with a portrayal of the plants with an utmost sensitivity in the narrator's retrospection of his early encounter with the hawthorns and the poppies in Combray.[92]

2.3 Identification and solitude

The intimate relationship with nature exhibited in Jean's perception where the self is integrated into the world inevitably contains a narcissistic element. According to Merleau-Ponty,

> [i]l y a un narcissisme fondamental de toute vision; et que, pour la même raison, la vision qu[e le voyant] exerce, il la subit aussi de la part des choses, que, comme l'ont dit beaucoup de peintres, je me sens regardé par les choses. (*PP*, p. 183)

Instead of being a one-way process, the vision of things is suggested by Merleau-Ponty to have a reciprocal dynamism, which is particularly evident in the painters who, while gazing, are at the same time the object of a gaze. Such a dynamism allows for an almost fantastic situation where the identity of self is reflected from a

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[90] Talia Welsh, *The Child as Natural Phenomenologist: Primal and Primacy Experience in Merleau-Ponty's Psychology* (Evanston: Northwestern U Press, 2013), p. xix.

[91] Ibid., p. xiii.

[92] *RTP*, I (1987), p. 129.

perspective outside itself. The vision of self is therefore 'doublée d'une vision complémentaire ou d'une autre vision: moi-même vu du dehors'.[93] In *Jean Santeuil*, the protagonist's intimate relationship with the flowers which allows him to find 'un peu de nous-même' in them effectively creates an effect of such a doubled vision, especially when he discerns an air of solitude in the plants.

Figure 15

Jean-Antoine Watteau, *L'Assemblée dans un parc*, c. 1716–17, canvas, 32 x 46 cm, Musée du Louvre, Paris.

When Jean discovers an iris during his afternoon walk, he calls it the 'créature merveilleuse et délicate' which 'semble avoir cherché la solitude'.[94] The image of a single iris standing alone produces a sentiment of solitude comparable to the mood created by Jean-Antoine Watteau through a single figure in his series of fêtes

[93] *PP*, p. 177.

[94] *JS*, p. 301.

galantes, for example the lady facing the lake in *L'Assemblée dans un parc* (figure 15). Having seen this painting during his visits to the Louvre, the young Proust expresses his appreciation for its melancholic atmosphere in the poem 'Portraits de peintres' dedicated to Watteau, among other painters.[95] The intentional search for solitude outside a crowd might well be a reflection of the internal desire of the narrator – who may be seen as a mouthpiece of the young Proust - who identifies with the iris in his repugnance of social vanities.

This kind of identification is further seen in the capability of the protagonist to imagine the plants' self-awareness of its solitude due to the absence of a human gaze, for example, the poppy which

> dans ce sombre pays des herbes, amené là par personne, presque jamais vu par personne, laissant passer les heures, […] ne cessait de briller merveilleusement dans la pourpre magnifique, dans la naïve monotonie de sa beauté. (*JS*, p. 81)

The poppy, cut off from relations with other plants and human beings, embraces in Proust's description an almost existential gravity. In a similar situation, seeing in a wild valley 'une digitale violette […] habitante silencieusement et brillante de ce lieu' that the narrator calls 'un endroit de la terre',[96] Jean is so enchanted by such a solitude that he confesses, 'en ce moment, on y vit, il semble plutôt qu'on devrait y être mort sous cette digitale'.[97] Not only is the digitalis seldom gazed, Proust also accentuates the gaze of the flower itself by stating that it 'n'a jamais rien vu du reste

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[95] Ibid., p. 81.

[96] Ibid., p. 470.

[97] Ibid.

du monde'.[98] The reciprocity of such a doubled vision is further revealed after an opposite attitude is expressed by Jean's friend Henri who is charged with collecting botanic specimens for his coursework. Henri shows no interest in the flower, dismissing it by saying that this sort of digitalis 'existe partout';[99] whereas Jean insists on the particular aesthetic value of the flower that reflects his own spiritual isolation:

> 'Et moi aussi, se dit-il, bien souvent je me suis senti isolé du reste du monde comme la pauvre digitale. (*JS*, p. 471)

Upon recognising the particularity of the digitalis by seeing himself reflected in its image, Proust's protagonist demonstrates precisely a vision where the self is 'vu du dehors'.[100] In this manner, the protagonist not only interacts with the plants in nature in their mutual gazes, but also identifies with the plant's overall temperament in a vision where the subject, as Merleau-Ponty explains, is no more than the 'projet du monde'.[101]

III Time

In *Jean Santeuil*, the notion of time is a crucial element in the protagonist's experience with the landscapes and the life of nature. Through passages concerning gardens, riverbanks and fields in *Jean Santeuil*, along with relevant remarks in his early writings published in *Les Plaisirs et les jours* and *Le Figaro*, Proust lays emphasis

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[98] Ibid.

[99] Ibid., p. 471.

[100] *PP*, p. 177.

[101] Ibid., p. 491.

on several aspects of time, namely the ideal of eternity, the superposed temporal structure, and the perception and execution of movement.

The idea of eternity concerns the function of painting in general seen in Proust's evocation of the works of Van Dyck, while Proust describes a lived eternity that refuses a rigid crystallisation; it also arises from the particular state of attention in the act of reading in a natural environment as also depicted in the works of Berthe Morisot and Édouard Manet; furthermore, the timelessness in the endless returning of seasons and the ambiguity of memory form a common effect of eternity in Proust and in Monet.

Through the quasi-spatial consideration of time in the manner of viewing Monet's painting series in *Jean Santeuil*, Proust attributes to time a certain thickness that transcends the conventional chronological metaphor that compares time to a sequence of paintings. And in the aspect of movement, Proust presents a tension between stillness and movement in the protagonist's observation of nature that also poses the question of movement in the paintings as still images. He also introduces a state of being in his protagonist that approaches a painter's immersed identity in nature as illustrated by Merleau-Ponty, which emphasises the participation and aliveness in the movements of the emerging world; at the same time he demonstrates a predilection for the specific painterly gestures that manipulate the painting material in the course of creation as those of Madeleine Lemaire and Henri Fantin-Latour.

3.1 The ideal of eternity

3.1.1 Eternity and painting

The fact that all moments are connected in a continuous and endless line and no moment can be singled out as an independent entity as in Zeno's paradox of the immobile arrow, does not necessary lead to the negation of the notion of eternity. Since time, according to Merleau-Ponty, is lived, and therefore it is groundless to state that one experiences time as something outside himself/herself, because as Merleau-Ponty argues, 'je suis moi-même le temps, un temps qui "demeure" et ne "s'écoule" ni ne "change"'.[102] Thus an explanation is provided for the profoundness in the sense of pure existence that borders on the state of eternity in the paintings appreciated by Proust as previously analysed in Chapter 1, whereas in Proust's description of the interaction with nature in *Jean Santeuil*, the notion of eternity is often evoked in the protagonist's meditation in front of a plant or a garden scene. In fact, one of the favourite gardens of the protagonist is named 'les Oublis', an idealised symbol of a spiritual state that transcends time.[103] Proust's rumination on eternity, reflected in the almost illusionary experiences in the garden, is inseparable from his understanding of the art of painting, and his aspiration to the out-of-time state converges with the visions of the artists conveyed in the depictions of gardens, such as those of Monet.

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[102] *PP*, pp. 481-82.

[103] *JS*, p. 327.

Mortality remains one of the essential features of the beings in nature, and the wish of the protagonist in *Jean Santeuil* to defy or forget such a truth is revealed in his imagination that freezes a certain moment. For example, the nickname of hydrangea leads him to visualise a world of eternity:

> 'boules de neige', comme le jardinier disait à Jean qu'elles s'appelaient, mais qui cueillies ne fondaient pas dans sa main, qui restaient toutes blanches et aussi grosses dans les vases de la salle à manger. Jean pensait vaguement qu'on était arrivé enfin à ces jours où rien ne changerait plus, à partir desquels sa mère resterait éternellement jeune et lui éternellement libre et gai. (*JS*, p. 325)

The seemingly naïve amazement at the non-melting snowball indicates a promise of the never fading beauty of a flower, of youth, and of happiness. Such is also a painterly wish to preserve the moment, which the young Proust expresses in 'Portraits de peintres' in *Les Plaisirs et les jours* through his fascination with the works of Van Dyck. In the portrait painted by the artist, the young Duke Richmond lives in eternity and the apple in his hand remains permanently fresh.[104] However, such a painterly wish largely differs from a simple and rigid capture from a sequence of changes like that of the arrow in Zeno's paradox. Instead of being a dead and frozen piece of time, the eternity in Proust's vision embraces an element of the living. In another scene where the protagonist enters a quasi-eternal state while gazing at a blossoming apple tree, time is thus endowed with a certain thickness through being lived:

> Ce qu'il y a qui nous sourit dans ces fleurs blanches qui se suivent alternées de leurs bouquets roses, c'est quelque chose comme une vie bien différente de ce que nous appelons quelquefois la vie, et qui nous rend si triste à la pensée que nous la perdrons, bien qu'elle nous semble ennuyeuse. Au

[104] Ibid., p. 82.

> contraire dans ce moment où nous sommes si heureux nous ne redouterions pas de la perdre et d'en rien laisser. (*JS*, p. 279)

Rather than that the full potential of the present is excavated to the extent that the past and the future are forgotten, the experience described here refers to a moment of visual pleasure which is so intense that the past, the present and the future are all present in one as in Merleau-Ponty's suggestion 'je suis le temps' that lives. In such a state of eternity, death and mortality lose their meaning. From this perspective, the previously mentioned experience of Jean in front of a digitalis holds true — 'on devrait y être mort sous cette digitale'.[105] Such an experience not only resembles the effect of a painting that preserves the moment, but also approaches a state of ultimate aesthetic pleasure in gazing at an artwork, prefiguring a later episode in the *Recherche* where Bergotte considers his life less important than the 'petit pan de mur jaune' in Vermeer's work.[106]

3.1.2 Eternity and attention

Another approach towards the experience of eternity in nature in *Jean Santeuil* consists of depicting a human activity that involves a particular kind of attention in its interaction with nature, that is, the portrayal of reading. For example, while reading in his room in Illiers, Jean from time to time observes through the window the chestnut trees of M. le curé.[107] In this way, in addition to recognising nature as an

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[105] Ibid., p. 470.

[106] *RTP*, III (1988), p. 692.

[107] *JS*, p. 310.

equally important part to the figures in his vision, like many Impressionist paintings of garden scenes where the central figures and the plants are treated in a balanced manner, Proust attributes to painting a temporal element manifest in the attention of the depicted human figure. Such an attention to nature is different from the descriptions of plants in scrupulous examination as analysed previously that almost paint their portraits, and it also does not refer to the complete absorption into reading like that of the protagonist's friend who 'au bout de quelques minutes […] ne savait plus où il était';[108] it suspends between the two clearly defined situations, like the status of the protagonist who looks for a place near Henri before setting down to read, an involuntary distraction from his activity and a quasi-aimless gaze at the natural surroundings.

Figure 16

Berthe Morisot, *Reading*, 1873, canvas, 46.00 x 71.80 cm, The Cleveland Museum of Art, Cleveland.

[108] Ibid., p. 491.

Figure 17

Edouard Manet, *Jeune fille dans un jardin*, 1880, canvas, 153.7 x 116.8 cm, private collection.

A similar ambiguity is observable in the Impressionist works on reading in gardens such as Berthe Morisot's *Reading* (figure 16) and Édouard Manet's *Jeune fille dans un jardin* (figure 17). There is a certain empathy from the part of the artists with the portrayed figures — the attention of the latter, which oscillates between total absorption and some occasional distraction, is reflected in the almost abstract casual strokes of the green bushes around the figures in both works.

The attention in Proust's depiction of reading has a similar effect to the previously mentioned pure existence that defines time as 'une dimension de notre

être' according to Merleau-Ponty.[109] With the interception of the plants, trees and green fields in nature, the status between looking and not-looking, thinking and not-thinking, not only approaches the visual effect of the Impressionist manipulation of the natural environment, but also echoes the intentionless gaze of the figures depicted in Vermeer's genre paintings analysed in Chapter 1 where the subtlety of being inside and outside of time remains the underlying charm of his œuvre.

3.1.3 Eternity and memory

In the aspect of the paradox of being inside and outside of time, another crucial level of manifestation in Proust exists in the interaction between visual experience and memory. In the latter part of *Jean Santeuil*, the grown-up protagonist, disappointed by the ephemeral nature of love, reckons that

> les choses qui nous touchèrent ne touchent plus, que les souvenirs sont morts parce que le passé n'a plus de sens pour nous. (*JS*, p. 771)

However, he is to change his mind after discovering a group of trees that 'ondulaient en riant au vent dans le soleil' and the riverside of the Seine that pleasantly resembles the effect of 'une fantaisie de peintre'.[110] Further, upon seeing

> les plantes sur une rivière, ces premières petites feuilles des lilas penchant leur tête délicate et douce entre le grillage des petits jardins de la banlieue, ces vastes arbres fruitiers comme un enchantement blanc ou rose fleuri tout à coup derrière un mur comme l'apparition d'une beauté enivrante et fraîche. (*JS*, p. 772)

he confesses,

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[109] *PP*, p. 475.

[110] *JS*, p. 772.

> qu'est-ce donc que tout cela sinon des témoins de nos premiers printemps, des reliques des souvenirs de nos premières émotions en face de la nature, mais qui n'ont rien perdu de leur pouvoir sur nous, qui ouvrent soudain notre cœur aux mêmes félicités délicieuses, qui nous font échapper aux années pour nous rendre à la nature, aux transformations mystérieuses de l'année et qui baignent les choses et les événements autour de nous dans une sorte de vie plus grande qu'eux, que nous reconnaissons pour en avoir approché déjà autrefois, qui n'est pas dans notre jeunesse plutôt que dans notre vieillesse, qui pour un moment semble nous montrer le monde qui nous entoure non comme le monde médiocre, bientôt fini pour nous, tout humain et connu, mais comme un monde éternel, éternellement jeune, mystérieux, plein de promesses inouïes? (*JS*, p. 773)

The sense of eternity in the quoted paragraph is derived from a paradox of perception where the 'premières émotions' are resuscitated while the source of such an impression remains ambiguous. The experience in front of nature by the riverside of the Seine allows the protagonist to 'échapper aux années' and arrive at a time that he recognises as what he had 'approché déjà autrefois', a time which does not concretely exist in his memory, but rather resembles a primordial state, close to what Merleau-Ponty speculates as the memory preserved by the body, as previously analysed with regard to the perception and memory of a single colour. Such a memory, not taking the form of specific events, constructs the very structure of perception, which is permanently present but impossible to locate, creating an atmospheric 'monde éternel'.[111]

Considering Monet's series of paintings of the Giverny garden, Riley underlines that

> each work was clearly conceived at a specific time of day, what we experience in looking at a finished canvas is a serene sense of timelessness. (Riley, 'Colour for the Painter', p. 58)

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[111] Ibid., p. 773.

Figure 18

Claude Monet, *La Seine à Lavacourt*, 1880, canvas, 98.4 x 149.2 cm, Dallas Museum of Fine Arts, Dallas.

The sense of timelessness is comparable to what the protagonist of Proust experiences as an eternal world, the paradoxical relationship between the first impression and the indefinable time demonstrating a striking similarity to Hubert Haddad's evaluation of Monet's works that create an expression of 'ce que les plus anciens souvenirs avaient d'intemporel'.[112] For example, in Monet's depiction of the riverbank of the Seine in *La Seine à Lavacourt* (figure 18), the moderate degree of the ambiguous blurriness in the brushstrokes not only suggests a tender movement in the overall landscape where the clouds also advance and the trees 'ondulaient' as in Proust's texts, but also foregrounds the temporal and eventual impreciseness

[112] Hubert Haddad, *Le jardin des peintres*, p. 128.

through the creation of an almost fantastic atmosphere, consistent with what Proust describes in his 'word painting' as 'une fantaisie de peintre'.[113]

As another apparent characteristic of the natural world, the mortal lives that wither and die will always be replaced by new lives in another cycle. Such rhythmic cycles of nature account for another vision of eternity in Proust. For instance, in the episode of 'Un parc à la saison des roses' Jean observes that:

> Nous sommes heureux de voir couronner les plates-bandes des jardins nouveaux, y mettre ces couleurs ravissantes, intenses, musquées, que nous reconnaissons comme l'éclat persistant des années d'autrefois, dont tous ceux qui vivaient alors ne sont pas morts et dont survivent ces créatures qui ne se souviennent pas de nous, ces folles capucines, ces rosiers immobiles, ces fuchsias qui regardent à terre, comme le monde n'était tout de même pas une suite ininterrompue de tableaux qui ne reviennent pas, comme si les années passées vivaient encore dans ces jardins pareils. (*JS*, p. 473)

The aesthetic value of such regular returns of the seasons is rooted in the perception of time that similarly foregrounds the repetition of habitual gestures depicted in the genre scenes as analysed in Chapter 1. In both cases, Proust casts doubt on the commonly perceived mode of time as in 'une suite ininterrompue de tableaux qui ne reviennent pas',[114] just as Merleau-Ponty's refutation of the river metaphor that simplifies time into an object that passes in front of the subject.[115] Instead, through attributing to time a certain transparency by underlining the almost indiscernible

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[113] *JS*, p. 772.

[114] Ibid., p. 473.

[115] Merleau-Ponty points out that the 'célèbre métaphore' of time being a river that flows from the past to the present and the future is in fact confusing, because it presupposes an observer unaffected by the change of time who follows the river during the whole course, which is illogical due to the spatio-temporal integrality of the world. *PP*, p. 470.

repetition of the seasons, he proposes the possibility of overlaying moments in a 'juxtaposition' or a 'pénétration', to use Bergson's terms, under a presumed condition of eternity where nothing is ever really lost.

3.2 The composite vision of time

The reason for the eternity behind the seasonal cycles mentioned above may also explain such comments by the young protagonist in *Jean Santeuil*:

> On dit qu'en vieillissant nos sensations s'affaiblissent. Peut-être, mais elles s'accompagnent de l'écho de sensations plus anciennes. (*JS*, p. 476)

The way the protagonist considers time conveys an almost omnipotent ease that projects a future where one looks back at the past moments. To understand such an ease, it is necessary to refer to Merleau-Ponty's interpretation of Husserl's proposition 'Stiftung', a term 'pour désigner d'abord la fécondité illimitée de chaque présent qui, justement parce qu'il est singulier et qu'il passe, ne pourra jamais cesser d'avoir été et donc d'être universellement'.[116] The regular return of time as in the seasonal cycle in nature and the impromptu return of sensory experiences both designate time as eternally present like Husserl's 'Stiftung', in the way a physical structure forms a basic 'établissement',[117] as Proust also calls 'l'édifice immense du souvenir' later in the *Recherche*.[118]

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[116] Merleau-Ponty, *Signes*, p. 73-74.

[117] Ibid.

[118] *RTP*, I (1987), p. 46.

Perceiving time from such a panoramic and a quasi-spatial perspective almost involves a tendency to transcend the four-dimensional world where time can be viewed freely from a higher dimension without any chronological constraint. Proust expresses an aspiration for such a freedom through proposing a particular way of experiencing time while viewing art works. In *Jean Santeuil*, reflecting upon Marquis de Réveillon's collection of Monet's landscape paintings, the protagonist concludes on the meaning of the aesthetic perception of a place:

> Nous aurions mieux aimé [un endroit] si nous n'y avions pas vu à un moment de l'année comme un spectacle, si nous avions aimé toutes les heures de sa vie parce qu'elles manifestent sa vie. (*JS*, p. 897)

As in the quoted paragraph, in front of the several landscape paintings of Monet, by denying the preference for the depiction of one particular moment, the protagonist again refuses to consider the paintings as 'une suite de tableaux'[119] of a certain place that come one after another as if one can wait for the scene in the manner of waiting for 'un spectacle';[120] he suggests that one should love 'toutes les heures de sa vie',[121] underlining the equality of all the paintings of a series by Monet as regards beauty, value and sequence. Such a vision of time is demonstrated in this manner of appreciation where all the tableaux are arranged in a juxtaposed, or rather a superposing way, manifesting at the same time the charm of a place as a whole, in an attitude close to Bergson's spatial perception of time at the bottom of his triangular diagram analysed in Chapter 1. The thickness of time that Proust pursues

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[119] *JS*, p. 473.

[120] Ibid., p. 897.

[121] Ibid.

in his way of viewing art reveals a comprehension of Monet, whose series such as the one depicting the Japanese bridge (figures 19, 20, 21) involve a variety of colours and light effects, in recognising the value of every painting, and in considering the gaze of the painter as a whole that no particular painting can represent, or rather, in front of which the particular paintings are no longer important.

Figure 19

Claude Monet, *Le bassin aux nymphéas, harmonie rose*, 1900, canvas, 90 x 100.5 cm, Musée d'Orsay, Paris.

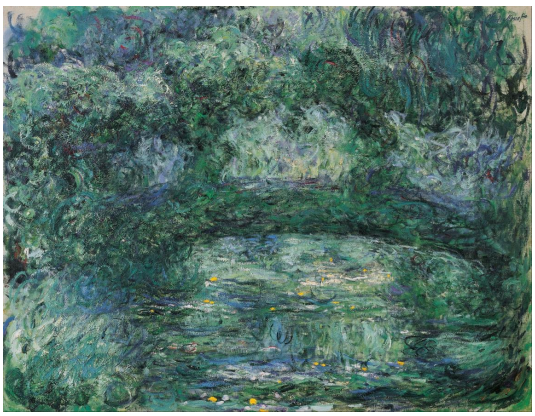

Figure 20

Claude Monet, *The Japanese Bridge*, 1918/1924, canvas, 115.5 x 89 cm, Beyeler Foundation, Riehen.

Figure 21

Claude Monet, *The Japanese Footbridge, Giverny*, 1922, canvas, 88.9 × 94.1 cm, Museum of Fine Arts, Houston.

3.3 Movements

3.3.1 Stillness and movement

Apart from the grand panoramic view of time, Proust also demonstrates a refined vision of time on a microscopic scale, which is seen in his observation of ephemeral movements. In addition to demonstrating a sensitivity to the change of colour and light as mentioned in the previous section on colour, the protagonist in *Jean Santeuil* is also particularly attracted to the movements of plants. For example, after pulling close the head of a lilac to smell its perfume, he intently observes the movement of the branch when he lets it go from his hand:

> [L]e mouvement plein de grâce avec lequel cette tête légère et adorée se rejette en arrière et, toujours ravissante et pure, est maintenant immobile et gracieusement inclinée au-dessus des feuilles (*JS*, p. 323)

Proust's description of Jean's visual experience here presents a tension between movement and stillness. Through underlining the gaze at the elastic movement of the lilac branch and the observation of the graceful stillness in its original position, Proust at the same time associates and differentiates the two moments. Appreciating the stillness of the lilac resembles the observation of a painting, whereas the stillness in this way no longer refers to an isolated depiction of a moment, but as in Merleau-Ponty's suggestion, it designates an interlaced relationship of the past, the present and the future, exhibiting an open and pregnant dimension of time. Such an effect is also revealed in the ability of the protagonist of *Jean Santeuil* to visualise movement from a still image. For instance, the flowers that resemble angels in Renaissance paintings as quoted previously are perceived to fall from the air and 'se laisser glisser à terre en s'entrelaçant'.[122]

3.3.2 Gestures of painters

The movement in Proust's description of nature not only concerns plants, but also largely resides in the state of the person who himself is also a part of nature, and who in depicting nature as painters do, executes gestures that are consonant with the movement of the emerging world.

As previously analysed, Merleau-Ponty proposes a perception largely based on the integrated relationship between the world and the body, and therefore the subject loses its isolated status as a spectator, and

> le système de l'expérience n'est pas déployé devant moi comme si j'étais Dieu,

[122] Ibid., p. 298.

> il est vécu par moi d'un certain point de vue, je n'en suis pas le spectateur, j'y suis partie. (*PP*, p. 350)

The fact that the experience is lived instead of passively received due to the integral status of the self to the world determines the perception as being alive and moving. The painter, extolled by Merleau-Ponty as the interpreter of the rhythm of the world, therefore undoubtedly 'naît dans les choses'.[123] Thus, the value of artistic creation is not restricted to the final product; instead, the process of creation that involves much movement, and that precisely reflects the integrated and interacting relationship between the artist and 'les choses', is highlighted.[124] There is no wonder that Merleau-Ponty describes Matisse's movements as a dance when referring to the slow motion film that records the painter in the course of painting, where the brush

> qui, vu à l'oeil nu, sautait d'un acte à l'autre, on le voyait méditer, dans un temps dilaté et solennel, dans une imminence de commencement du monde, tenter dix mouvements possibles, danser devant la toile, la frôler plusieurs fois, et s'abattre enfin comme l'éclair sur le seul tracé nécessaire. (Merleau-Ponty, *Signes*, p. 57)

The painter's attempted movements form a dance that participates in the emergence of the world. A primordial sense of a profound connection consists in precisely such a liveliness of movements, although the end result remains a seemingly still image. Reversely, living in the world in such a primordial sense is most aptly defined as living in the painting, for as Merleau-Ponty suggests:

> Vivre dans la peinture, c'est encore respirer ce monde, — surtout pour celui qui voit dans le monde quelque chose à peindre, et chaque homme est un peu celui-là. (*ŒE*, p. 81)

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[123] *ŒE*, p. 69.

[124] Ibid.

There cannot be a more accurate description of Proust's vision than 'celui qui voit dans le monde quelque chose à peindre', and what Proust seeks is not to represent a scene through a rigid picture, but rather, as previously analysed with regard to the personification, identifying himself with nature, to 'respirer' the world as a painter does.[125] Such an attitude towards life and movement is made evident in the protagonist's confession on his experience in a paradise-like garden where he has 'l'air moins de célébrer cette joie que de la ressentir, d'y participer'.[126] The vision of an ideal garden in Proust is therefore inevitably a place where the self is merged with the world around it, which explains Proust's eulogising comments in the essay 'Les Éblouissements: par la Contesse de Noailles' on the poet's works that depict 'un radieux jardin d'été où elle [l'auteur] se confond'.[127]

In the aforementioned process where colour and shape take form as the painter participates in the emergence of the world, the trace of specific painterly gestures also reveals the moving nature of creativity. One of them concerns the gesture of applying paint. Merleau-Ponty refers to an anecdote of Renoir, in which others were surprised to see him working in front of the sea on a painting that depicts women bathers in a totally different setting. On the colour blue in this work, Merleau-Ponty comments, 'chaque fragment du monde, [...] contient toutes sortes de figures de l'être'.[128] The utilisation of paint in the hands of the painter, in this way,

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[125] Ibid., p. 81.

[126] *JS*, p. 298.

[127] *CSB*, p. 535.

[128] Merleau-Ponty, *Signes*, p. 70.

coincides with the power of becoming where the unity and the fluidity of elements manifest themselves in the very movement of creativity.

Proust's recognition of such unity and fluidity is revealed in his aspiration to the painterly gesture of applying paint that realises a borrowing of colour. For instance, in a poem dedicated to Madeleine Lemaire, he writes

> Et c'est auprès des lys et des rosiers grimpants
> Que vous allez chercher vos couleurs, Madeleine. (*CSB*, p. 367)

Looking for colours in the flowers, as in the quoted lines, speaks less of a gesture of copying the colour of the flower on the canvas, but more of being inspired by the colour of the flower, that is, absorbing an element into the creative reservoir to be freely utilised elsewhere, mimicking the movement of arranging the same paint among different areas on the canvas with a brush or a knife.

In Proust's description of the natural world, he utilises this gesture by underlining the material commonality of colours. The forget-me-nots are described as 'levant l'un à côté de l'autre leur petite fleur d'un bleu profond comme un petit morceau bleu du ciel tendu vers lui',[129] suggesting the manipulation of a painter who removes a touch of blue colour from the sky and applies it to the flowers. The painterly arrangement manifest in Proust's vision works equally well in reverse, for instance in the depiction of the sky of a 'couleur des pensées qui semblent leur emprunter leur couleur'.[130] The connection among colours accentuated by Proust in

[129] *JS*, p. 298.

[130] Ibid., p. 773.

these texts, apart from demonstrating a vision that seeks 'amitié'[131] in an overall painterly composition as analysed in Chapter 1, reveals through the emphasis on the movement ('tend [re]'[132] and 'emprunter'[133]) a painterly gesture by which the world emerges in unity and fluidity.

In addition to the arrangement of paint within a tableau, Proust's predilection for painterly gestures is revealed in the protagonist's fascination with the creation of a colour through the motion of mixing. For instance, when Jean appreciates the 'épine rose' in *Jean Santeuil*, the colour reminds him of a childhood memory of mixing the strawberries with some cream cheese:

> [L]e souvenir de ce fromage à la crème blanc qui, un jour qu'il y avait écrasé des fraises, devint rose, du rose à peu près de l'épine rose, et resta pour lui la chose délicieuse qu'il jouissait le plus à manger. (*JS*, p. 332)

Figure 22

Henri Fantin-Latour, *Flowers, White Roses*, 1871, canvas, 26 x 30.48 cm, private collection.

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[131] Ibid., p. 380.

[132] Ibid., p. 298.

[133] Ibid., p. 773.

By associating the colour of 'l'épine rose' with the richness of the cream cheese and the freshness of the strawberries, Proust foregrounds the materiality of an aesthetic presence that reveals a process of colour and textual transformation, which in the domain of the visual arts, is similarly achieved through the painter's mixing gesture directly on the canvas when practising the impasto technique. The colour pink in Proust's vision, is therefore no longer a rigid quality of an object, but a presence that gradually emerges in volume and in texture. Thus the joy that the protagonist revels in, other than a gastronomic satisfaction, is the fact that the movement approaches the creative gesture of a painter. For example, Henri Fantin-Latour's *Flowers, White Roses* (figure 22) conveys such a joy of creating a subtle pink that emerges with the voluminous white paint in the movement of flow and twist; the form and the texture already embed the movement of the gesture, giving emphasis to what Proust designates on the colour of the 'épine rose' as the process of 'dev[enir]'.[134]

IV Space

As the protagonist of *Jean Santeuil* walks through gardens, parks and valleys and appreciates paintings that depict these environments, Proust demonstrates a comprehensive variety of spatial perception. Firstly, the protagonist's visual experience of the distance and the perspective manifest the ambiguity and complexity of a binocular vision, disagreeing with both the Renaissance notion of an

[134] *JS*, p. 332.

immobile space and the Rationalists' assertion of an objective spatial perception. Second, the awareness and the presumption of space on a larger scale as suggested by Merleau-Ponty,[135] is emphasised by Proust through describing the integral presence of a place, the spatial isolation from other places, the extension of vision in the marginal areas of a spatial entity and the change of places through the transition between different parts of a large spatial area on the basis of a panoramic perception. Last, space in Proust's early writing is essentially presented as a lived experience through the suggested involvement of bodily movements.

4.1 The Ambiguity of binocular vision

The objectivity of space receives vigorous criticism from Merleau-Ponty, who suggests that the uncertainty and the changeability of space often neglected by Rationalists constitute the major characteristic of human perception. The grasp of space, especially of objects at a closer distance, according to Merleau-Ponty, largely resembles the way one perceives time:

> Je 'tiens', j''ai' l'objet distant sans position explicite de la perspective spatiale comme je 'tiens encore en main' le passé prochain s [136] ans aucune déformation. (*PP*, p. 307)

His comparison of objects in the distance to moments of the recent past in time reveals an unproven certainty which almost verges on the idea of faith. Based on this

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[135] Merleau-Ponty underlines the temporality of the perception of space, which enables the supposition of a vast and all-around view of space based on 'une immense Mémoire du monde' where an object is founded. *PP*, p. 83-84.

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proposition, he raises questions as to the perception of distance and of dimension, disapproving the validity of the long tradition of the monocular perspective theory developed in the Renaissance, according to which everything appears 'parfaitement immobile' with a fixed size based on its distance to the viewer. The actual visual phenomenon resulting from the functioning of the two eyes, as Merleau-Ponty argues, proves to be far more complicated.[137] The binocular structure of one's vision realises an integration which is not simply the synthesis of two monocular visions, therefore it is impossible to perfectly reproduce in the form of a picture or film. For instance, as Merleau-Ponty points out, objects in the distance appear larger in proportion to nearby objects than what is seen through a camera.[138]

In his descriptions of the activities in the natural environment, Proust precisely underlines the character of uncertainty in spatial perception by pointing out the ambiguity of distance and of movement that deviates from common beliefs. For example, when reading with Henri in the pine tree wood in front of a vast field, Jean observes that

> [q]uelquefois quelques-uns passaient si près qu'on les voyait distinctement avancer même assez vite, suivis de près par d'autres. Mais au milieu de l'immensité calme quelques-uns paraissaient immobiles. (*JS*, p. 491)

The ambiguous relationship between the distance from the viewer and the scale of the object in the visual field pointed out by Proust demonstrates a question not merely of relativity, but of a particular binocular visual phenomenon where the

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[137] *PP*, p. 268.

[138] Merleau-Ponty, *Sens*, pp. 20-21.

distant pedestrians are enlarged compared to a representation of Renaissance perspective, creating the impression of being 'si près' while appearing almost 'immobiles'.[139] It is such a recognition of the spatial uncertainty that provides for Proust's protagonist an open attitude to comprehend spatial phenomena of different scales in nature, ranging from the miniature structure of a flower to broader fields of land extending towards unknown territories.

4.2 Distance and location

4.2.1 Integral spatial structure

Merleau-Ponty's emphasis on perception as a grasp of 'l'ensemble du champ'[140] as previously mentioned in the analysis of colour and form also applies to the perception of a certain spatial environment. Similar to the identification with natural forms based upon the participatory role of the body that implicates the self into the world, a place is also to a certain extent comprehended as an integral whole lived by the viewer, and is therefore almost endowed with a conscious personality, as expressed in Merleau-Ponty's quote of Cézanne, 'le paysage […] se pense en moi et je suis sa conscience'.[141] In this manner, the integral character of a certain place is constituted not of the mechanical combination of all its elements, but of their consonant 'manière d'habiter le monde'.[142]

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[139] *JS*, p. 491.

[140] *PP*, p. 355.

[141] Merleau-Ponty, *Sens*, p. 30.

[142] Merleau-Ponty, *Signes*, p. 68.

In *Jean Santeuil*, Proust underlines the integral character of a spatial structure through an elaborate description of the protagonist's hesitation over whether to uproot a digitalis in the valley:

> Jean eut envie de l'emporter avec lui, dût-il la déraciner, qu'importe, et il aurait voulu aussi emporter ce val, le ravir à cet isolement absolu […]. Puis il n'osa plus. [...] il aurait fallu tout emporter à la fois, et la forme de l'anfractuosité, et la particularité de la solitude, la physionomie de son silence. (*JS*, p. 471)

The impossibility to 'tout emporter à la fois' discourages Jean from taking away the flower, for even together with the valley the wholeness of the place would not be maintained; the 'particularité de la solitude' speaks of an almost temporal dimension embedded with irreplaceable thoughts and manners. In addition, referring to the same type of place, Proust describes them as 'ayant comme une sorte de figure, une figure à [eux][143] à laquelle certains s'habitueront jusqu'à avoir pour elle une amitié comme une figure humaine',[144] explicitly revealing a comprehension that intimately associates the protagonist and his natural environment as a single conscious being.

The vision that values the integral characteristic of a place is also manifest in Ruskin's various studies of valley landscapes during a trip to Switzerland, such as *An Alpine Valley, the Matterhorn in the Distance* (figure 23). The undefinable identity of these works, oscillating between the records for a geographical research and the exercises for a painter's observation and technique, reveals precisely a vision that recognises the landscape as a whole through both a loyal depiction of the land's

[143] Corrected by editor.

[144] *JS*, p. 470.

physiognomy and the attentiveness to the overall aesthetic quality demonstrated in the balance between light and shadow, colour and space, detail and sketch.

Figure 23

John Ruskin, *An Alpine Valley, the Matterhorn in the Distance*, 1844-1849, watercolour over pencil on paper, 35.4 x 26.9 cm, Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery.

4.2.2 Isolation

According to Merleau-Ponty, the body is where the 'voyant' merges with the 'visible'. The fact that the body is both seeing and seen, allows a double possibility for the perception of distance, as he suggests:

> À la fois, nous voyons les choses elles-mêmes, en leur lieu, où elles sont, selon leur être qui est bien plus que leur être-perçu, et à la fois nous sommes éloignés d'elles de toute l'épaisseur du regard et du corps: c'est que cette distance n'est pas le contraire de cette proximité, elle est profondément accordée avec elle, elle en est synonyme. (*VI.*, p. 178)

The coexistence of proximity and distance explains a vision which is capable at the same time of closely observing the object and of evaluating the object based on a larger spatial presumption. Apart from the particularity of the place analysed in the

previous section, such a larger spatial presumption provides the ground for the sense of separation and of isolation in a certain place.

In the encounter with the digitalis in the valley, as previously mentioned, a special spatial experience emerges in Jean, who speculates that

> [l]'endroit où l'on est né est plus que bien loin d'ici, il en est séparé. Un lieu de terre est cela. Si habité qu'il soit, c'est aussi loin que s'étend la vue des pommiers, que porte le souffle de la brise de mer. (*JS*, p. 470)

Later, he exclaims at the ambiguous sense of distance:

> Ah! et bien plus près c'était aussi loin, il n'y avait pour elle ni loin ni près, elle était séparée du reste de la terre. (*JS*, p. 471)

On the one hand, Jean is physically close to the valley the paragraph refers to; on the other hand, he experiences a strong sense of distance as if seeing the place from a farther away view point, allowing for a vision that also covers his birthplace. To express such a perceptual struggle of the paradoxical spatiality, he defines it as 'ni loin ni près', underlining at the same time the spatial separation and the double vision discussed in the previous section.

4.2.3 The marginal space

According to Merleau-Ponty, the human mind constantly maintains a 'croyance au monde', that is to say, in spite of all the misunderstandings and perception errors occurring incessantly, one always corrects and modifies one's perception, believing in the world as 'une synthèse achevée'.[145] Therefore, regarding the recognition of space, the unknown regions are not blank zones in the perception; they are

[145] *PP*, p. 381.

attributed an existence by the mind as part of the complete presumption of the world, which is why Merleau-Ponty asserts that the unvisited desert suggested by Berkeley has nevertheless a viewer, which is the one who exercises a mental experience by thinking about the place.[146]

Such a complete presumption forms a ground for the experience at the boundary between the known and the unknown spaces, which is most likely to trigger thoughts about the spaces beyond physical reach. In the previously quoted episode on the digitalis in the valley in *Jean Santeuil*, the spatial character of the place resembles exactly such a threshold of perception. Looking beyond to the unknown places, the narrator states:

> Après sont d'autres lieux, aussi séparés de tout, de tout ce que leurs arbres ne verront jamais au-delà de leur horizon, où la nuit ne tombe pas sur les mêmes choses, mais sur d'autres qu'une pensée de la nature semble avoir arrêtées là dans l'ignorance de toutes les autres. (*JS*, p. 470)

The perception of the protagonist does not stop at the marginal space where he locates himself, but continues as a hypothesis in a rather abstract form with an extraordinary attentiveness. A similar experience of Jean near the edge of the park involves equally as much consideration of the unknown spaces, which the narrator interprets as an imagination of an immature mind:

> Jean était à cet âge où la terre n'est pas devenue quelque chose de parfaitement connu et réel, où l'on ne serait pas étonné qu'un endroit nouveau, un endroit bien réel planté d'arbres et où on peut marcher donnât accès sur un monde irréel. (*JS*, p. 305)

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[146] In explaining the inseparable relationship between the object in the world and the subject that perceives, Merleau-Ponty utilises the Empiricist philosopher George Berkeley's example, stating that 'même un désert jamais visité a du moins un spectateur, et c'est nous-même quand nous y pensons, c'est-à-dire quand nous faisons l'expérience mentale de le percevoir'. Ibid., p. 370.

The private gardens and public parks in *Jean Santeuil*, like the 'jardin d'agrément' suggested by Clare Willsdon, are mostly located in the margins of the city which links familiar places and the wild area.[147] They serve as an intermediate zone, and the view from their border, sometimes partially hidden by the trees, evokes a presumption of a strange and even an 'irréel' place.[148] As shown in Camille Pissarro's *Un coin de jardin à l'Hermitage* (figure 24), which depicts a garden thirty kilometres northwest from Paris, the corner of the garden, through partially revealing the road and the blurry shadows of the trees outside the boundary, opens up an otherwise enclosed vision and introduces the possibility of an uncertain extension of space, introducing an almost unreal spatial perception as similarly expressed in Jean's experience.[149]

Figure 24

Camille Pissarro, *Un coin de jardin à l'Hermitage*, 1877, canvas, 55 x 46 cm, Musée d'Orsay, Paris.

[147] Clare A. P. Willsdon, *In the Gardens of Impressionism* (New York: Vendome Press, 2004), p. 75.

[148] *JS*, p. 305.

[149] Judith Bumpus and Martine Erussard, *Les Jardins des impressionnistes* (Oxford: Phaidon, 1990), p. 22.

4.2.4 Spatial transition

Based on the integral coherence of a certain place and the presumption of unknown areas beyond marginal zones, the perception of space in *Jean Santeuil* continues to expand to even grander scales, demonstrating a panoramic awareness that covers different spatial zones and laying emphasis on the changes in transitional regions. When Jean appreciates an art dealer's collection, he expresses a particular interest in a Corot, which according to the narrator, creates

> un sentiment plus profond de la campagne qu'un Monet, car cette personnalité de la terre variée qui a besoin des distances est peut-être quelque chose de plus intimement lié à la réalité, de plus caché et de plus doux qu'une impression plus sensuelle. (*JS*, p. 895)

Figure 25

Camille Corot, *Soisson vu de la fabrique de M. Henry*, 1833, canvas, 80 x 99 cm, Rijksmuseum Kröller-Müller, Otterlo.

Corot's work that Proust refers to, which depicts 'la terre variée' and the sense of 'distances', according to the narrator, is 'très différent des brumeux qu'on voit généralement'.[150] This work of Corot, very likely belongs to the group of panoramic landscape paintings executed from 1830s including *Soisson vu de la fabrique de M. Henry* (figure 25), under the influence of Flemish and Dutch masters such as Philips Koninck, Jacob Van Ruisdael and Meindert Hobbema.[151] These works, presenting a refined depiction of the spatial characteristics of a village or a town viewed from a higher perspective, appropriately explains Zola's definition of Corot's works as belonging to a 'naturalisme moderne' that demonstrates a 'compréhension large des ensembles'.[152]

The particular landscape portrayed in the work of Corot that the protagonist contemplates is described as a view

> qui était toute une étendue de pays vallonné avec un village répandu sur la pente. [...] La toile était très petite, mais le paysage était très vaste. C'étaient des pommiers. Ils étaient loin les uns des autres et ils occupaient une certaine étendue de campagne. [...] Il s'offrait comme on l'aperçoit dans une promenade, nouveau pour les yeux qui dans la campagne voient si vite le pays changer et qui, quand ils atteignent à un village d'un nom autre que celui où ils habitent, ont déjà fait beaucoup de chemin, sont comme dans un autre pays [...] Derrière le petit village il y avait une forêt indiquée comme on l'aperçoit quand on est encore un peu loin du village, et en continuant la campagne à droite du village, ce n'étaient plus des pommiers, mais des peupliers. Leur feuillage était plus sombre et leur taille plus élevée et plus élancée. On sentait qu'il y avait là beaucoup de pays [...] on entrait dans une autre terre. (*JS*, p. 894)

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[150] *JS*, p. 896.

[151] Vincent Pomarède, 'Une biographie d'ailleurs sans aventures', in *Corot, 1796-1875: 85 œuvres du Musée du Louvre: Analyse scientifique* (Paris: Réunion des musées nationaux, 1996), p. 157.

[152] Pascal Dethurens, *Écrire la peinture: de Diderot à Quignard* (Paris: Citadelles & Mazenod, 2009), p. 157.

In his description, Proust repeatedly underlines the transition between different spaces in the tableau which includes a 'vaste' landscape, the result not only of 'une fine description picturale de l'espace' as Vincent Pomarède comments on Corot's panoramic works,[153] but also of the effort to emphasise on the variation of the land. Proust particularly points out the visual change due to the replacement of the apple trees by the poplars with the sombre foliage and the slender forms, which apart from the disparity in form, also indicates the painter's various treatments that distinguish one part of the composition from another, creating a diversified spatial effect. In *Soisson vu de la fabrique de M. Henry* (figure 25), the segregation of zones is strongly accentuated by the contrast of light between the foreground and the middle field; the voluminous bush of the foreground is depicted through some varied brushstrokes in dark tones and some occasional thick highlights on the lighter-coloured herbs, whereas in the middle ground with the slender poplars the grass field is painted with an even layer of pale green. Such an 'inégalité de son [Corot] exécution en certaines parties de ses toiles', though disapproved by some critics, serves nonetheless to create an excellent sense of spatial variety appreciated by Proust.[154]

The comprehension of a structure, according to Merleau-Ponty, entails an active involvement of the subject:

> Avoir l'expérience d'une structure, ce n'est pas la recevoir passivement en soi: c'est la vivre, la reprendre, l'assumer, en retrouver le sens immanent. (*PP*, p.

[153] Vincent Pomarède, 'Une biographie d'ailleurs sans aventures', p. 157.

[154] Anne Roquebert, 'Quelques observations sur la technique de Corot', in *Corot, un artiste et son temps*, ed. by Chiara Stefani and others (Paris: Louvre, 1998), p. 85.

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Living the structure, as previously analysed in Chapter 1, necessarily associates the perception of space with the movement of the body. To illustrate such an operation where the movement and the spatial perception 'forment un système qui se modifie comme un tout',[155] he introduces the example of experiencing a cube:

> [L]oin que l'expérience du mouvement propre conditionne la position d'un objet, c'est au contraire en pensant mon corps lui-même comme un objet mobile que je puis déchiffrer l'apparence perceptive et construire le cube vrai. (*PP*, p. 235-36)

This presumed movement of the body is believed by Merleau-Ponty to be an integral part simultaneously embedded in the perception of a spatial structure. In *Jean Santeuil*, just as in his description of Chardin's still lives where the structure of the interior space is expressed by way of human gestures and movements, Proust assigns a presumed action of the body to the spatial perception of the protagonist in the natural world.

For example, flowers in *Jean Santeuil* are frequently associated with the image of a house, such as the 'pavillon violet'[156] of the cherry flower and the 'maison'[157] which an iris is compared to. When describing a garden that bursts with flowers in the summer, Proust writes, 'les fleurs étaient ouvertes comme des palais hospitaliers'.[158] Through evoking various architectural structures like in the metaphor of the cathedral when referring to the ray painted by Chardin, Proust implicates into

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[155] Ibid., p. 129.

[156] Ibid., p. 349.

[157] *JS*, p. 326.

[158] Ibid., p. 327.

the perception of the flowers a dwelling experience where the body of the viewer contemplates the structure through entering, exiting, moving around it. In this sense, the complicated structures of the flowers are magnified under the intent gaze of the protagonist.

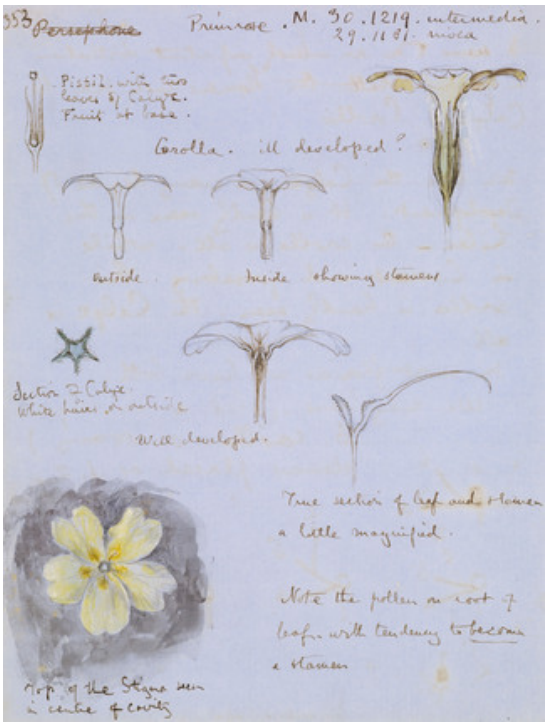

Figure 26

John Ruskin, *Eight Studies of a Primrose / Botanical Notes and Diagrams*, c. 1871 - 1879, pencil, pen and ink, watercolour and bodycolour on blue paper, 19.5 x 15 cm, Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery, Birmingham.

Ruskin's flower studies, such as *Eight Studies of a Primrose / Botanical Notes and Diagrams* (figure 26), portraying the internal structures of the flowers with an intensity that equals his own architecture studies, serves well as a visual example of the vision of Proust's protagonist that penetrates the spatial structures of the

flowers through the metaphors of houses that invite a virtual tour of the body to travel through both the interior and the exterior of the delicate structures.

The presence of a moving body in the perception of a spatial structure is also manifest on a larger scale. For instance, Proust shows a particular interest in the spatial construction of Jean's grandfather's garden close to the river:

> Le père de M. Santeuil avait de l'autre côté de la ville un immense jardin qui, s'étendant d'abord en terre-plein devant le cours du Loir, s'élevait peu à peu, ici par de lentes montées, là par des escaliers de pierres conduisant à une grotte artificielle, jusqu'au niveau des plaines élevées. (*JS*, p. 322)

The garden, situated on sloped ground, presents a voluminous spatial composition, like that of Ruskin's garden by the Coniston which gradually raises up from the level of the lake according with the local geographical character. And such a spatiality in Proust is expressed through a temporal approach, with the guiding indicators such as 'd'abord', 'peu à peu', 'ici' and 'là' suggesting the movement of a presumed body that walks through the garden.[159] The same manner of description is also discernible in the protagonist's observation of Corot's panoramic landscape painting previously quoted. Underlining the variety of the view depicted through an imagined experience 'dans une promenade',[160] Proust transforms the two-dimensional visual experience into a lived spatial voyage, in which the protagonist merges himself with the landscape depicted in Corot's painting, moves among different areas, appreciates the spatial transitions and marvels at the overall vastness.

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[159] Ibid., p. 322.

[160] Ibid., p. 892.

Conclusion

Devoting a large proportion of *Jean Santeuil* to the description of the botanical world including gardens, parks, woods, and fields, the young Proust virtually constructs an Eden in his early writings. Far from being idealised and abstract, this Eden is composed of varied concrete and tangible natural phenomena observed with an attention of utmost sincerity.

Firstly, regarding the perception of colour, the protagonist goes through different experiences in various contexts: a single colour is seen as a dimension without the omission of its referential value; the juxtaposition of two colours is emphasised for the discernment of their internal interaction; several colours are presented in a solidified and detached manner that underlines their texture and independent quality; the mixture of larger number of colours within a similar tone foregrounds movement and creates an airy atmosphere. Secondly, the form of vegetation is scrutinised by an intense gaze that emphasises the individuality of a particular plant, while the boundary of the subject and the object is blurred through personified expressions, thus revealing a way of looking that identifies the protagonist with the natural world outside himself. Thirdly, in understanding time in the world of vegetation, Proust often shows a predilection for the idea of eternity, realised through the physical medium of painting, the particular state of the attention of the observer, and the return of memories; he also proposes a way of seeing time in a composite manner beyond its chronological sequence and underlines the element of movement and change. Last but not least, the perception

of space in Proust's early writings, evincing the complexity of a binocular vision, covers various spatial structures including isolated spatial entities, margins and borders, foregrounding the transition of different spatial areas through the involvement of the moving body.

The particular attention and treatment of the aforementioned dimensions of the senses in the phenomenological world of nature, demonstrate various aesthetic similarities to the vision of painters brought to comparison in this chapter, namely Lemaire, Helleu, Monet, the Pre-Raphaelites, Ruskin, Fantin-Latour and Corot, as well as the Japanese aesthetic in the ukiyo-e that influenced many of these artists. The commonality of the vision of Proust and these painters could be more clearly identified within the Merleau-Pontian observation that investigates the fundamental and omnipresent phenomena of human perception, setting aside the pre-conceptual and objectivist attitude towards the world and the self with an attention to the ambiguities and the particularities that Proust's early works frequently present. However, instead of searching for a law of perception through systems of scientific method that he deems highly inadequate, Merleau-Ponty expresses a preference for a certain attitude, a certain way of perceiving and considering the world, which he equates with the vision of the painter that seeks to comprehend existence by way of 'assister du dedans à la fission de l'Être'.[161] The painters' constant challenge to conventional ways of seeing recalls Proust's aesthetic predilection for both the medium of painting and a painterly perception of the visual world which is

[161] *ŒE*, p. 81.

participatory, highly embodied with an openness of the senses that the young Proust naturally expresses through merging his protagonist with nature.

Proust, as the painters brought into comparison in this chapter, foregrounds the perception of the natural world itself to the extent of attributing to it an ontological significance. His attitude that tends towards the way how natural life in gardens, valleys, and woods appears to the consciousness through colour, form, time, and space, presents an excellent example of the phenomenological thinking that returns to the things themselves with a view to 'rapprendre à voir le monde'.[162] Such an attitude, when met with the more volatile and intangible landscapes of the sea and the sky, engenders a comparable yet more complicated vision, dialoguing with painters to be discussed in the next chapter, including Turner, Whistler, and Monet.

[162] *PP*, p. xvi.

Chapter 3

Water and Air Depiction:

Proust's Aesthetics with Turner, Whistler, and Monet

The depiction of water and air takes up a considerable proportion of Proust's early writings. Largely inspired by his journeys and stays in Normandy and Britanny, as Tsumori points out, the young Proust produced numerous essays eulogising the charm of the sea and the sky, including 'Choses Normandes', published in the journal *Le Mensuel*, 'La Mer' and 'Marine' in *Les Plaisirs et les jours*, and, even more significantly, he devoted a chapter in *Jean Santeuil* to the seaside village Beg-Meil, the reminiscence of which appears constantly in later chapters.

The young Proust's vision of water and air, rich in painterly qualities, cannot be dissociated from his admiration of a group of painters who are extraordinary in their depiction of atmosphere, river scenes and seascapes, namely Joseph Mallord William Turner, Claude Monet and James Abbott McNeill Whistler. As Yoshikawa demonstrates, through his friend Marie Nordlinger who offered him advice on the translation of Ruskin's works, Proust kept himself closely informed of news of Whistler, especially relating to the trial against Ruskin, and he is very likely to have visited the great exhibition of Whistler at l'École des Beaux-Arts in 1905. He frequently viewed the works of Monet in private collections and public exhibitions including the exhibition in gallery Durand-Ruel in 1905 that displayed several works on the Thames theme. With regards to Turner, it is not only very possible that the

young Proust saw his works in the collection Groult, but also that he observed a large number of reproductions of Turner's works in picture albums such as *The Rivers of France*[1] and the illustrated *The Works of John Ruskin*,[2] even producing a drawing himself entitled 'Entrée du Port de Dulwich par Turner', as well as highlighting Turner's vision in the essay 'John Ruskin'.[3]

These three painters, demonstrating striking aesthetic similarities to Proust's writings, particularly in the depiction of water and air, have been studied in terms of their own artistic dialogue, including the influence of Turner on Monet and Whistler and the friendship between the two latter, as investigated in the Tate exhibition 'Turner Whistler Monet' in 2005. Although purposely disapproving of the works of Turner due to the conflict with Ruskin, Whistler nevertheless betrayed a resonance in his style with Turnerian aesthetics, and even Proust tried to perceive a reconciliation between Whistler and Ruskin in terms of their artistic believes: when discussing the long-term effort epitomised in one brief execution, Proust wrote in his letter to Marie Nordlinger that for Whistler and Ruskin, 'la vérité est une et ils la percevaient tous deux'.[4]

Concerning the commonalities of the vision of these three painters and their significant roles in art history, Tamsin Pickeral summarises,

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[1] J. M. W. Turner, *The Rivers of France* (London: Longman, Rees, Orme, Brown, Green & Longman, Paternoster row, 1837).

[2] John Ruskin, Edward Tyas Cook, and Alexander D. O. Wedderburn, *The Works of John Ruskin* (London; New York: G. Allen; Longmans, Green, 1903-1912).

[3] Yoshikawa, *Proust et l'art pictural*, pp. 319-38.

[4] Cited by Vallès-Bled, *Proust et les peintres*, p. 276.

> between Monet and Whistler they change the criteria of accessing the discipline (of landscape). The architect of this change was Turner, who introduced a number of key innovations for viewing and painting landscape.[5]

These innovations of seeing, manifest in the perception of particular visual qualities such as indistinctness are equally visible in the early writings of Proust on water and air.[6] Based on a Merleau-Pontian analysis, this chapter seeks to delineate the commonalities between the vision of Proust and that of the three painters in their foregrounding of the particular phenomenological aspects in the domains of colour, space and movement. We will also evaluate the four artists' correlations with the Romantic sublime as well as Oriental aesthetics.

I Painterly qualities

The perception of water and air in Proust's early writings, betraying strong similarities to that of Turner, Whistler and Monet, is unquestionably a painter's vision. First, the choice of colour in Proust demonstrates a clear predilection for a bright and subdued palette to create an airy and nuanced atmosphere, which correlates with the distinguished character of colour use of all the three artists, whose works also define the beauty of indistinctness and internal harmony which are constantly eulogised through the immersive experience of the viewer in Proust.

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[5] Tamsin Pickeral and Michael Robinson, *Turner, Whistler, Monet* (London: Star Fire, 2005), p. 11.

[6] See Eric Shanes, 'Three Varieties of Indistinctness: A Beautifully Displayed Exhibition at Tate Britain Explores the Connections between Turner, Whistler and Monet, but Does It Do So Thoroughly Enough', *Apollo*, 161 (2005), 91.

Second, Proust's depictions of seascapes and atmospheres convey a strong sense of the physical presence of an actual painting through the perception of the particular textures that resemble paint and the forms that resemble brushstrokes, which respectively echo the signature painting techniques of the three artists. Furthermore, even the synesthetic experience of a viewer in front of the windy sea in *Jean Santeuil* is carefully constructed in a manner that approximates a high degree the multi-sensory perception of a tableau. All these phenomenological convergences between Proust and Turner, Monet, and Whistler not only reveal a specific aesthetic affinity for their visions, but also foreground the significance of painting upon which Merleau-Ponty places great ontological emphasis.

1.1 Colour

As quoted in the previous chapter, Merleau-Ponty emphasises the autonomous identity and the ontological significance of colour in *L'Œil et l'esprit*, defining the dimension of colour as 'celle qui crée d'elle-même à elle-même des identités, des différences, une texture, une matérialité, un quelque chose'.[7] Agreeing with such an emphasis, in Proust's early writings on art and his painterly descriptions, colour constitutes a crucial visual structure, and it continues to dominate even more largely the descriptions of water and atmosphere, which are often first referred to in respect of colour instead of form. In enumerating the colours of such a vision, Proust evokes the creative process of applying colour fields on a work of art. For example,

[7] *ŒE*, p. 67.

as the protagonist in *Jean Santeuil* walks into the cemetery behind a church which faces a field under the sun-set sky, the depiction of the visual experience is attributed with almost no quality other than colour:

> Les pâturages où les vaches paissaient côte à côte [dans] la lumière du soir, les bois, les maisons, les chemins descendaient au loin, assez raides pour que Jean pût voir l'horizon tout entier. Au loin, les champs étaient roses et les bois étaient bleus. Puis, au-dessus de la ligne des collines, violets comme elles mais plus clairs, de vastes nuages presque roses s'étendirent traversés de nuages gris, et bientôt, le soleil s'étant caché, l'immensité que Jean avait devant lui perdit ces belles couleurs en restant bleue à l'extrémité des bois et sur les collines. (*JS*, p. 363)

The 'belles couleurs', namely 'roses', 'bleus', 'violet', 'gris'[8] become the precise aesthetic identities of the fields, woods, hills, and clouds. By simply pointing out the colours and their internal relation ('violets comme elles mais plus clairs'),[9] Proust realises a process of colour arrangement, in which the colour variety and harmony of the overall picture are prioritised to the extent that the actual geographical entities in reality ('champs', 'bois', 'collines', 'nuages') [10] cease to be the principle existence of the vision that possess colour merely as a quality, and almost fade away as a compositional reference of a picture where colour plays a decisive role.

Water and atmosphere, which are naturally endowed with an ethereal touch that evades visual definition of shape and structural complication, are without a doubt an ideal context for the perception of colour as a dimension, offering a freer frame for the vision of Proust that embraces colours with a certain sensory nudity. As

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[8] *JS*, p. 363.

[9] Ibid.

[10] Ibid.

he refers to the surface of the sea in twilight, his descriptive language is pregnant with nothing apart from colour:

> Presque toutes les barques de pêches étaient rentrées au soleil couchant. Maintenant le soleil était presque couché. Ils partaient. La mer, loin était rose, plus près jaune, là-bas rouge, ayant le vernis, le velouté de l'huile. Les vagues toutes basses jetaient une écume violette sur le sable. La rame en passant sur les eaux brisait leurs glacis, faisait fuir au loin la couleur, faisant passer entre les eaux safranées ou roses un remous d'or. (*JS*, p. 383)

The way that colours are mixed in water and air is celebrated by Proust with such an absorbed fascination. When one perceives the light by the seaside with eyes half closed, the delicate sensory experience of the subtle combination of colours is translated by Proust through an extraordinary metaphor:

> Cette lumière est délicatement rose, blanche, dorée, sans qu'il sache si c'est la couleur de l'atmosphère ou la couleur de ses paupières, comme ce bruit que nous entendons quand nous approchons un coquillage de notre oreille, si vague que nous ne savons pas s'il vient du coquillage ou de notre oreille. (*JS*, p. 288)

The lack of distinction in form facilitates a profound reading of colour for the artist, similar to Monet's works that depict the less commercialised Normandy riverside of the Seine and the coast, which according to Richard Thomson, reflects an effort to 'reduc[e] his looking to the elements of landscape', of which the sensory perception of colour is exhausted to its fullest.[11]

[11] Richard Thomson, 'Looking to Paint: Monet 1878-1883', in *Monet: The Seine and the Sea 1878-1883* (Edinburgh: National Galleries of Scotland, 2003), p. 19.

1.1.1 Brighter and nuanced palette

The fully awakened visual sense of colour in Proust and the seascape masters Turner, Monet, and Whistler, firstly, is manifest in the vision of a range of brighter colours than that reflected in the academic treatment of tones in the paintings of earlier periods. The suppression of grey shadows, for example, is one of the principle characteristics that, according to Ruskin, marks a transition in Turner's career from the imitation of old masters in the first period to his truthful and excellent depiction of nature in the second period.[12] Along with the disappearance of dark foregrounds, as observed by John House, it is also something which largely influenced the use of colour for the French Impressionists including Renoir and Monet.[13]

Proust's palette, as can be observed in the previous quoted paragraphs, similarly avoids dark tones. His vision of the sea, for instance, addresses nothing but the lighter range of colours, 'rose', 'bleu', 'violet', 'blanche', and 'doré'.[14] Not only does he move away from the dramatic presence of dark colour tones, he also keeps the colours from being too intensive and going beyond the moderate range. His colour depiction, instead, focuses on the subtle internal nuances of one or two colours, for example, the 'riches nuances bleues'[15] of the afternoon seascape seen from a cliff evoked by the protagonist as a reminiscence of his many enjoyable moments in the past.

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[12] John Ruskin, *Ruskin on Pictures*, ed. by Edward Tyas Cook (London: G. Allen, 1902), p. 31.

[13] John House, 'Tinted Steam: Turner and Impressionism', in *Turner, Whistler, Monet Impressionist Visions*, ed. by Katharine Lochnan and others (London: Tate Publishing, 2005), p. 38.

[14] *JS*, p. 287.

[15] Ibid., p.531.

Figure 1

Monet, *Antibes, effet d'après-midi*, 1888, canvas, 66 x 82.5 cm, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

The vision of such colour nuances is equally evident in the seascape paintings of Monet, such as *Antibes, effet d'après-midi* (figure 1). The surface of the sea is depicted by innumerable brushstrokes of colours slightly varied around dark blue, sky blue, ultramarine, turquoise, pale green, dark green, pale violet, woven into each other and gradually lightened up as a whole from the lower right to the lower left of the canvas.

In the nuanced colour composition of this work, there is an accentuated dialogue between green and blue which is almost a signature of Monet's seascapes, to which Proust constantly attributes equal attention in his depictions of the sea, to the extent that he incorporates it into his visual vocabulary, attributing the two colours — green and blue — of the parrot to the colours of the sea.[16] A vision of such

[16] Ibid., p. 491.

a colour composition is typically present in the view through Mme Santeuil who looks out from the window at the sea in *Jean Santeuil*:

> Il diminuait déjà un peu, mais on sentait encore sous sa coque noire les coups et la poussée de la mer vigoureuse, mousseuse comme de la bière, qui tout entière au soleil, ressemblait à des champs où une culture verte alterne avec une culture bleue, cependant que çà et là des restes de neige étincellent, tandis qu'ailleurs elle est grise, les nuages donnant de l'ombre par grandes places. (*JS*, p. 213)

Figure 2

Monet, *Ombre sur la mer à Pourville*, 1882, canvas, 57 x 80 cm, Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek, Copenhagen.

The simile of the alteration of the fields of different colours aptly conveys a vision that discerns and divides the sea surface into different areas through the poetic juxtaposition of green and blue. Such a depiction reveals an almost identical vision in the works of Monet such as *Ombre sur la mer à Pourville* (figure 2), where the colour in the lower area of the view is cooled down with the effect of the cliff's shadow in violet blue, interacting with the strand of greener colours in the upper area depicting the sea surface exposed to the sun.

As mentioned previously, the light palette of Proust resembles the colour use of these three artists. Turner draws on the colour sensibility of, as Mark Francis notes, Venetian painting,[17] and the 'pale but brilliant and delicately balanced palette of the Italian Primitives' as John Gage suggests;[18] Monet obtained the use of the purple tonality in shade from the works of Titian and Delacroix.[19] These colour treatments distinguish the colour vision in Turner, Monet, and Whistler from the traditional sombre depiction of the sea such as that in *A Dutch Ship coming to Anchor* by Willem van de Velde the Younger, and converges with that of Proust.[20] Also for Monet and Whistler, while keeping with the thematic choice of the Barbizon school and the Realists such as Courbet, they invest an intense gaze into water and atmosphere as much as into colour itself. [21] The deep engagement with colour in the works of water and air is most evident in Turner's later works such as the Swiss watercolours which were highly esteemed by Ruskin, as well as the unfinished watercolour sketches that were named 'colour beginnings',[22] Whistler's *Nocturne*

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[17] Mark Francis, 'Not Dark Yet: Turner in the Year 2000', in *J.M.W. Turner: The Sun is God* (Liverpool: Tate Gallery, 2000), p. 12.

[18] John Gage, *Colour in Turner: Poetry and Truth* (London: Studio Vista, 1969), p. 96.

[19] Anne Roquebert, 'Seascapes in Normandy', *Claude Monet: 1840 - 1926*, ed. by Guy Cogeval and others (Paris: Musée d'Orsay, 2010), p. 97.

[20] Willem van de Velde the Younger, *A Dutch Ship coming to Anchor*, 1657, canvas, 55 x 62 cm, National Gallery, London.

[21] Claude Monet, Heather Lemonedes, and others, *Monet in Normandy* (New York: Rizzoli, 2006), p. 83.

[22] Christine Riding, J. M. W. Turner, and Richard Johns, *Turner & the Sea* (London; Salem: National Maritime Museum; Peabody Essex Museum, 2013), p. 203.

series, and Monet's later works that contain a fuller absorption of the colour poetics of Turner, such as the Waterloo series.

Similar to the works mentioned above, Proust's choice of colour for dusk demonstrates a predilection for a delicately nuanced range, as in the paragraph quoted previously:

> [L]oin, les champs étaient roses et les bois étaient bleus. Puis, au-dessus de la ligne des collines, violets comme elles mais plus clairs, de vastes nuages presque roses s'étendirent traversés de nuages gris. (*JS*, p. 363)

Figure 3

Monet, *Soleil couchant sur la Seine à Lavacourt, effet d'hiver*, 1880, canvas, 100 x 150 cm, Petit Palais, Paris.

Figure 4

Turner, *The Rigi: Last Rays*, c. 1841-2, watercolour on paper, 24.1 x 30 cm, Tate, London.

Figure 5

Turner, *Study of Sea and Sky*, Isle of Wight, 1827, canvas, 32.1 x 50.2 cm, Tate, London.

The depiction of the distant field and the wood underlines a friendly interaction between pink and blue, indicating a poetic understanding of colour. In works like Monet's *Soleil couchant sur la Seine à Lavacourt, effet d'hiver* (figure 3) and Turner's *The Rigi: Last Rays* (figure 4), the light blue revealing the distance and the cooler tone of the dusk correlate seamlessly with the ethereal area of the air tinted by pink in the effect of the last rays of the sun. Especially in Turner's watercolour, Mount Rigi as a semi-transparent layer of pink that merges indistinctively with the air and the bluish wash of the distant lake, becomes almost as substantial as a visual existence of colour as a representation of geographical reality, pregnant with the co-existence of representation and the independent identity in Merleau-Ponty's terms of colour perception as discussed in the previous chapter. In addition, the mastering of colour alteration in Turner's *The Rigi: Last Rays* seen in the right part of the picture where the airy depiction of the violet mountain continues to infiltrate the upper part, superposed with another layer of pink, offers a visual illustration of the aesthetic expressed in Proust's later description of clouds which are 'violets comme [les collines] mais plus clairs', whereas the following scene of the vastness of the pink of the clouds crossed through by the grey clouds in *Jean Santeuil* conveys a vision highly similar to that in Turner's *Study of Sea and Sky* (figure 5). In the latter's work, an immense area of pink sky occupies three quarters of the composition, with broad and swift brushstrokes creating an extraordinarily smooth and flat surface, coinciding with Proust's emphasis on the vastness of the presence of a colour that stretches across the vision as if across a canvas. And in Proust's description, the interruption of

grey clouds amongst the grand expanse of pink produces a colour rhythm that resembles the greyish blue clouds in the middle of Turner's canvas.

1.1.2 Subdued lightness, presence of grey

It is worth noting that in this depiction of the landscape of dusk, as well as in the previous quoted paragraph on the sea with a field-like colour pattern, there is one final touch of grey added to Proust's overall vision that neutralises the colours into a moderate range (for the latter, 'tandis qu'ailleurs elle est grise, les nuages donnant de l'ombre par grandes places').[23] Such a manner, while allowing the omission of the traditional heavy tone in Proust's literary canvas, reinforces the harmony of the light palette with the smoothing presence of grey. In this regard, Proust's vision manifests an affinity towards Monet and Whistler.

Figure 6

Claude Monet, *Waterloo Bridge*, 1902, canvas, 65 x 100 cm, Kunsthaus Zürich.

[23] *JS*, p. 213.

Monet's 'enveloppe', a harmonious colour composition that covers the overall picture in an atmospheric greyish blur, as Charles Riley suggests, achieves its effect not only through the choice of the range of colours, but also in the process where the viewer sees the picture in a kinetic mode, actively mixing the different colours into a moderate tone, which is interestingly demonstrated in an experiment of spinning a work of Monet that results in a 'silver grey blur'.[24] The aesthetic of introducing a grey without causing the least dullness in colour is evident in Monet's later works that witness a full engagement with the Turnerian colour vision, such as *Waterloo Bridge* (figure 6).

The misty 'enveloppe' that encompasses pink, violet, blue and green in the indistinctive presence of a pale greyish tone in the picture conveys a vision of colour in Monet that is rich and all the while carefully restrained in a smooth and dreamy state.

The infatuation for such a dreamy state achieved in the subtle concord of colours mediated through the greyish tone, could also be seen in one of Proust's early poems describing the painting on some Japanese porcelains:

> …Pâles, ainsi qu'on voit aux rares porcelaines
> Le rêve d'une mer d'opale près d'Yuldo,
> Avril y souriait sur un fin glacis d'eau
> ……
> Au ciel s'alanguiraient les roses du matin (*CSB*, p. 341)

[24] Charles A. Riley, *Color Codes: Modern Theories of Color in Philosophy, Painting and Architecture, Literature, Music, and Psychology* (Lebanon: University Press of New England, 1996), pp. 72-73.

The impression of dreaminess that the poem evokes is precisely brought forward by the paleness of colour — 'une mer d'opale', the whitish blue almost resembling the tone that pervades the Monet tableau of the Waterloo bridge; and 'les roses du matin', so hazy and vague to the extent of acquiring a gesture of 's'alanguir', just like the pink of the reflected sunlight that almost dissolves in the water in the same painting.[25]

The masterful use of grey in harmonising colours in a vision far from being monotonous in Proust could not be but have a close affinity towards that of Whistler, whose *Nocturne* series mark the culmination of his dedication to the aesthetics of colour relationships. The use of mysterious and toned down colours in the *Nocturnes*, as Donald Holden suggests, appealed to the 'littérateurs and Symboliste movement' that were tired of crude colours,[26] like the protagonist in *Jean Santeuil* who dislikes the glaring sunset by the sea after moving with his parents from Saint-Germain to Dieppe:

> La mer et le sable miroitants lui faisaient mal aux yeux. Il ne regardait pas le coucher du soleil. Seulement, longtemps après le coucher du soleil, quand il faisait déjà nuit sur la mer qui était de la couleur bleu gris d'un maquereau, si dure que les barques semblaient la couper et que çà et là elle paraissait plutôt un grand banc de sable, alors il apercevait à l'entrée de la forêt d'Arques cette barre rouge qui protégeait l'entrée de la forêt de Saint-Germain et, remontant son petit col contre le vent frais qui lui salait les lèvres, il était content de rentrer se chauffer au feu qu'on allumait déjà un peu le soir. (*JS*, p. 211)

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[25] *CSB*, p. 341.

[26] Donald Holden, *Whistler Landscapes and Seascapes* (New York: Watson-Guptill Publications, c 1969, 2009), p. 50.

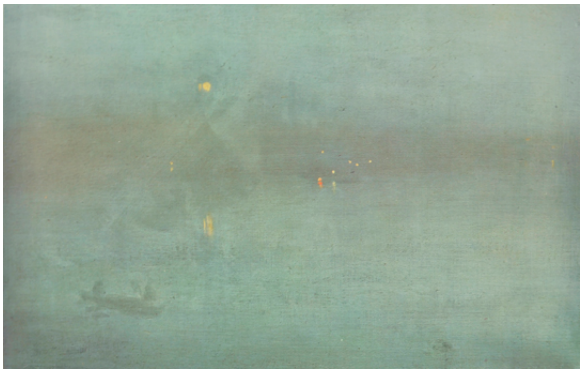

Figure 7

Whistler, *Nocturne, Blue and Silver: Battersea Reach*, c. 1872-78, canvas, 39.4 x 62.9 cm, Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston.

Figure 8

Whistler, *Nocturne: Blue and Silver – Chelsea*, 1871, wood, 50.2 x 60.8 cm, Tate, London.

The overall colour scheme of the sea after sunset in Proust is dominated by the 'bleu gris d'un maquereau', the subtle coordination of two colours that reflects a similar vision of Whistler who named most of his *Nocturne* series with two colours, one of which often being 'silver' or 'grey'. In these *Nocturnes* such as *Nocturne, Blue and Silver: Battersea Reach* (figure 7) and *Nocturne: Blue and Silver – Chelsea* (figure 8),

as Holden suggests, Whistler maintains a limited palette throughout the whole picture.[27]

However, neither Whistler nor Proust insists on the absolute uniformity in colour. Apart from mediating his colours through applying a warm ground under the layer of cold hues,[28] Whistler utilises slight and bright highlights to lift up the colour composition. In Proust's description, the protagonist obtains a sense of satisfaction when he welcomes a 'barre rouge' in his vision. The 'barre rouge', while being a nostalgic relief for the protagonist who is still emotionally attached to Saint-Germain where he could see a similar scene, equally on a phenomenological level introduces a bright accent to the general greyish tone of the tableau. In a similar manner, in Whistler's works such as *Nocturne, Blue and Silver: Battersea Reach* and *Nocturne: Blue and Silver – Chelsea*, based on the vast wash of nocturnal grey of the water and the sky, one slim trace of vermilion in the upper middle of the composition indicates a reflection of light in the distance. The colour, like the 'barre rouge' in the vision of Proust's protagonist, completes the tableau with an apt touch of highlight.

[27] *JS*, p. 211.

[28] Ibid.

1.1.3 Shifts of taste in colour composition

Proust's aesthetic affinity with Turner as regards colour composition is manifest on different levels, corresponding to the varied stylistic characters of colour use during Turner's lifetime. First, to relate the clouds filled with rain in front of the protagonist who repeatedly sings a tune in *Jean Santeuil*, the scene is commented with a fleeting reference to Turner:

> où aussi le nuage chargé de pluie vous apparaît comme dans un décor de théâtre, comme quelque chose qui vous laisse indifférent et sur quoi on peut dire seulement un joli mot à celui qui est monté à côté de vous: 'Regardez le ciel, un beau Turner.' (*JS*, p. 343)

The gloomy landscape of the cloudy sky, reduced to an insipid existence for the cheerful protagonist, is compared here to a decorative painting that arouses no profound aesthetic sympathy in the viewer. The mention of Turner, apart from being a perfunctory remark, 'un joli mot', also creates a distance between Proust and a style of colour arrangement that predominates the early works of Turner before the 1820s which witness a heavy influence of the sublime sombre palette that serves as a severe backdrop for heroic sentiments.

Figure 9

Turner, *The Fighting Temeraire tugged to her last Berth to be broken up, 1838*, 1839, canvas, 91 x 122 cm, National Gallery, London.

Contrary to the grave palette of his early years, Turner's oil paintings in the 1830s undergo a dramatic change of colour use, the variety and the brightness of hues marking his unique style in the Romantic sphere. Proust, whether consciously or unconsciously, depicts one of the sunset scenes on the sea in *Jean Santeuil* precisely in the Turnerian manner of this period, particularly resembling his renowned *The Fighting Temeraire tugged to her last Berth to be broken up, 1838* (figure 9) in terms of colour composition (as previously quoted):

> Presque toutes les barques de pêches étaient rentrées au soleil couchant. Maintenant le soleil était presque couché. Ils partaient. La mer, loin était rose, plus près jaune, là-bas rouge, ayant le vernis, le velouté de l'huile. Les vagues toutes basses jetaient une écume violette sur le sable. La rame en passant sur les eaux brisait leurs glacis, faisait fuir au loin la couleur, faisant passer entre les eaux safranées ou roses un remous d'or. Comme dans ces promenades que l'on fait dans un pays où on a autrefois été heureux, il semblait qu'on respirait quelque chose de doux et d'exaltant comme le souvenir. La lune se levait blanche et quand elle devenait d'or, à l'occident le ciel et la mer étaient encore roses. (*JS*, p. 383)

In Proust's description, apart from the variety of bright hues underlined through enumeration as previously analysed, through introducing the moon into his tableau which is associated with cooler tones, Proust complicates the colour components just as Turner does in *The Fighting Temeraire tugged to her last Berth to be broken up, 1838*, where the colour structure is literally cut into several parts, both horizontally and vertically, illustrating a combining effect of the setting sun and the rising moon. In both the text and the painting, colours are employed in a relatively crude and direct way. For Turner, such a choice of colour possibly reflects an aesthetic influenced by his contemporary scientific research on colour, such as the

three-colour triad proposed by David Brewster.[29] In this excerpt, through echoing such an aesthetic preference, Proust demonstrates his interest in composing the overall structure of a picture through colours of the air and the water, which naturally exist as quasi-independent dimensions, to use Merleau-Ponty's terms.

Further on in *Jean Santeuil*, in describing a seascape in windy weather, Proust embraces even more fully the aesthetics of Turner's works, especially those in his late years that witness the culmination of colour rendering through a fantastical atmosphere. In Proust's depiction, the individual contemplates the sea in wind through his half-closed eyes:

> Partout les jeux de lumière sont mêlés aux jeux du vent. Il croit entendre le cri des mouettes qui volent au-dessus de la jetée et trouver à ses lèvres le goût du sel. Puis, sans [s'être] cependant soulevé, il trouve encore que c'est trop de fatigue et baisse ses paupières sur ses yeux comme des persiennes qui ne laisseraient passer que la lumière sans nous donner la vue des choses. Ce qu'il voit, c'est de la lumière seule qui a réussi à passer mais en devant renoncer à apporter avec elle le spectacle des choses. Cette lumière est délicatement rose, blanche, dorée, sans qu'il sache si c'est la couleur de l'atmosphère ou la couleur de ses paupières, comme ce bruit que nous entendons quand nous approchons un coquillage de notre oreille, si vague que nous ne savons pas s'il vient du coquillage ou de notre oreille. (*JS*, p. 287)

In this depiction of indistinct lights in different colours, the vision is no longer divided into disparate parts identifiable through the indicator 'ici' or 'là-bas' as in the previously quoted paragraph.[30] The colours of the light 'rose', 'blanche', 'doré' are perceived in an ambiguous mixture, so vague and subtle that the uncertainty is aptly

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[29] Gage, *Colour in Turner*, p. 124.

[30] *JS*, p. 383.

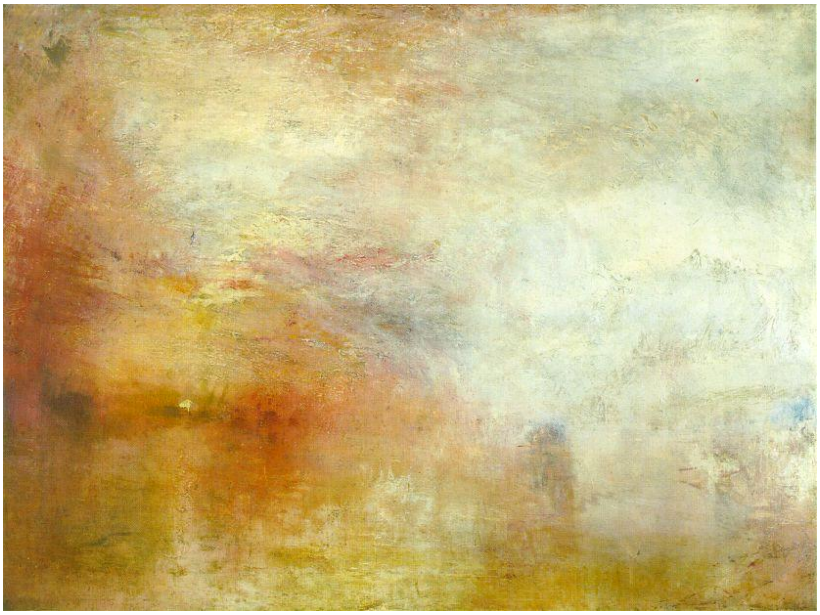

Figure 10

Turner, *Sun Setting over a Lake*, c. 1840, canvas, 91.1 x 122.6 cm, Tate, London.

Figure 11

Turner, *Seascape with Distant Coast*, c. 1840, canvas, 91.4 x 121.9 cm, Tate, London.

expressed through the analogy to the perception of the semi-transparent flesh and blood of one's eyelid. Such an ambiguity finds no better equivalent than in the works of Turner, for example *Sun Setting over a Lake* (figure 10) and *Seascape with Distant Coast* (figure 11), where the colours of the atmosphere, with an effect of wind, flow, disperse, and mix in free forces and leave millions of delicate traces, creating a blurry impression that bears a strong resemblance to the dreamy shutter of the half-closed eye.

1.1.4 Indistinctness of colour and musicality

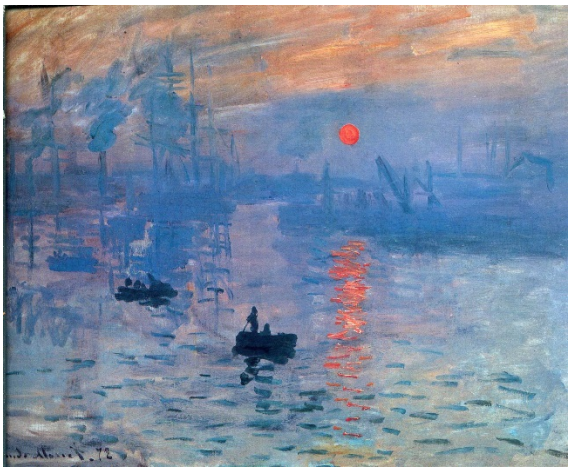

Figure 12

Monet, *Impression, soleil levant*, 1872, canvas, 48 x 63 cm, Musée Marmottan Monet, Paris.

The ambiguity created through colours indistinctively merging into each other is precisely one of the principle aesthetic affinities between Turner, Whistler and Monet. The Impressionist aesthetics as they developed, according to John House, learned from Turner the lesson of focusing on 'a set of carefully orchestrated

pictorial relationships on the surface of the canvas'.[31] For Monet, as pointed out by Katharine Lochnan, his *Impression, soleil levant* (figure 12) seems to incorporate the poetics of both Turner's sunrises and sunsets and Whistler's *Nocturnes*, to the extent that it was mistaken by some viewers for a depiction of the Thames.[32] Moreover, both Monet's Thames and Venice series are engaged in a dialogue with the works of Turner and Whistler in their dreamy depiction of water in a colour harmony.[33] And for Whistler, in the trial against Ruskin who condemned him for 'flinging a pot of paint in the public's face', it is through establishing the links between his style and Turner's late works that his supporting friends and lawyer founded their crucial prosecuting argument.[34] Ruskin's idol, Turner, they contended, had equally created great works that are criticised for their lack of a standard sense of finish by the public who perceived nothing but a 'meaningless confusion of colour'.[35]

It is worth noting that in Whistler's own defence, he stated that '[m]y whole scheme was only to bring about a certain harmony of colour', concerning his *Nocturnes*, which he defined as 'an arrangement of line, form and colour'.[36] The rhythm of the colour relationship in these works, reveals a similarity to the

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[31] House, 'Tinted Steam: Turner and Impressionism', p. 38.

[32] Katharine Lochnan, 'Turner, Whistler, Monet: an Artistic Dialogue', in *Turner, Whistler, Monet Impressionist Visions*, p. 22.

[33] Ibid., p. 35.

[34] John Ruskin's acid lambasting of Whistler's *Nocturnes* in Fors Clavigera led the latter to sue him for libel, with the case comming to court in 1878. Margaret F. MacDonald, 'Whistler and the Thames', *An American in London: Whistler and the Thames* (London: Philip Wilson, 2014), p. 29.

[35] Lochnan, 'Turner, Whistler, Monet: an Artistic Dialogue', p. 27.

[36] MacDonald, 'Whistler and the Thames', p. 29.

composition of notes in music in terms of a general mood these combinations convey. As a reviewer of the *Nocturnes* in *The Times* comments,

> painting is so closely akin to music that the colours of one may and should be used, like the ordered sounds of the other, as means and influences of vague emotion; not dramatic emotions, but moulding our moods and stirring our imaginations.[37]

Such an allusion to music in the depiction of water is reminiscent of the wider appeal of musical analogies to nineteenth-century artists and art critics, among whom Walter Pater's well-known maxim 'all art constantly aspires to the condition of music' summarises an appreciation of the significance of music to the general understanding of artistic style.[38] Such an appeal to music also constantly appears in Proust's early essays on the sea. For instance, in 'La Mer' in *Les Plaisirs et les jours*, referring to how the sea stirs one's imagination, Proust relates that '[e]lle nous enchante ainsi comme la musique, qui ne porte pas comme le language la trace des choses, qui ne nous dit rien des hommes'.[39] Also in 'Choses Normandes' published in *Le Mensuel*, Proust again touches upon the similar idea that 'la mer, qui dans le monde créé correspond à la musique, puisque, ne nous montrant rien de matériel, et n'étant point à sa manière descriptive',[40] which corresponds perfectly with Whistler's explanation of his intention for the title 'Nocturnes', which is to 'dives[t]

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[37] Ibid., p. 27.

[38] Walter Pater, *The Renaissance Studies in Art Papers, Vol 4* (Oxford and New York: Oxford U P, 1986), p. 86.

[39] *JS*, p. 143.

[40] *MR*, p. 134.

the picture of any outside anecdotal interest'[41] and to focus on the internal relationship of the colours themselves.

Through suggesting a connection to music, Whistler's understanding of the ways colour composition functions as a crucial element to artistic creation, approximates the power of the invisible in Proust as explained by Anne Simon, a Merleau-Pontian inclination towards the objectively non-delineable dynamics of a work of art which is crystalized in Proust's consideration of style.[42] The early writings of Proust on water and atmosphere, already demonstrating such a vision of colour that is akin to Turner, Whistler and Monet, anticipate the revelation towards the end of the *Recherche* — 'le style pour l'écrivain aussi bien que la couleur pour le peintre, est une question non de technique, mais de vision'.[43]

1.2 The Physical quality of a painting: textures and brushstrokes

Apart from the painterly use of colour, there is a tendency in Proust's depictions of seascapes that approaches the physical quality of a tableau of painting. For instance, the previously quoted paragraph of the direct reference to Turner evokes the quality of 'un décor de théâtre',[44] and as Thomas Baldwin suggests, such a tendency can be understood as influenced by the painterly style of description in Flaubert, who writes 'ça avait l'air d'un paysage peint, d'un immense décor de théâtre fait exprès pour

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[41] MacDonald, 'Whistler and the Thames', p. 29.

[42] Anne Simon, *Trafics de Proust: Merleau-Ponty, Sartre, Deleuze, Barthes* (Paris: Hermann, 2016), pp. 73-79.

[43] *RTP*, IV (1989), p. 474.

[44] *JS*, p. 343.

nous'.[45] The awareness of the physical presence of a painting while describing a real scenery, however, is further developed in Proust to form a unique 'phenomenological modelling tool'[46] that conveys the visual experience not only through a quasi ekphrasis of two-dimensional objects,[47] but also through the tangible and perceptible qualities that demonstrate a resemblance to actual pieces of art. Specifically, in depicting the forms and textures in his vision of the sea, Proust frequently mentions the sometimes oily, sometimes dry or hardened appearance of the water which resembles the painting surface of Turner, Whistler and Monet, and his descriptions of the waves also allude to the shapes of the brushstrokes of Monet.

1.2.1 The oiliness and dryness of a painting surface

The vision that perceives the quality of oil paint in the sea is evident in the description in *Jean Santeuil* quoted previously of Jean's gaze at the sea when he arranges the boat:

> La mer, loin était rose, plus près jaune, là-bas rouge, ayant le vernis, le velouté de l'huile. (*JS*, p. 383)

Here, Proust combines the effect of the warm colour 'rose', 'jaune' and 'rouge' with a tangible quality of the oil as if they were the oil paints applied here and there in the hands of an artist; he even goes as far as to point out that the surface of water has a layer of 'vernis', which completes the vision of a piece of oil painting by attributing to

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[45] Thomas Baldwin, *The Material Object in the Work of Marcel Proust* (New York: Peter Lang, 2005), p. 104.

[46] Ibid., p. 123.

[47] Ibid., p. 126.

it an almost unique painterly quality. The texture of the dispersed oil paint in warm colours with a glazed touch reveals a similar vision of water to that of Turner, particularly in his work *The Angel Standing in the Sun* (figure 13), where the principle colours red, yellow, and orange, applied with a suffusion of oil solvent, work perfectly to create the gleam of sunlight on the sea.

Figure 13

Turner, *The Angel Standing in the Sun*, exhibited 1846, canvas, 78.7 x 78.7 cm, Tate, London.

A similar but subtly varied vision can be seen in the depiction of another sunset on the sea in *Jean Santeuil*, where the reflection of sunlight captures the protagonist's attention:

> Et tandis qu'il se figurait les voiles passant une à une, il voyait les eaux éblouissantes s'éteindre peu à peu et en même temps prendre ces couleurs si ravissantes et si rares, prendre, garder, aviver, adoucir encore les reflets les plus magiques du ciel sur le glacis enchanté de leur surface. (*JS*, p. 388)

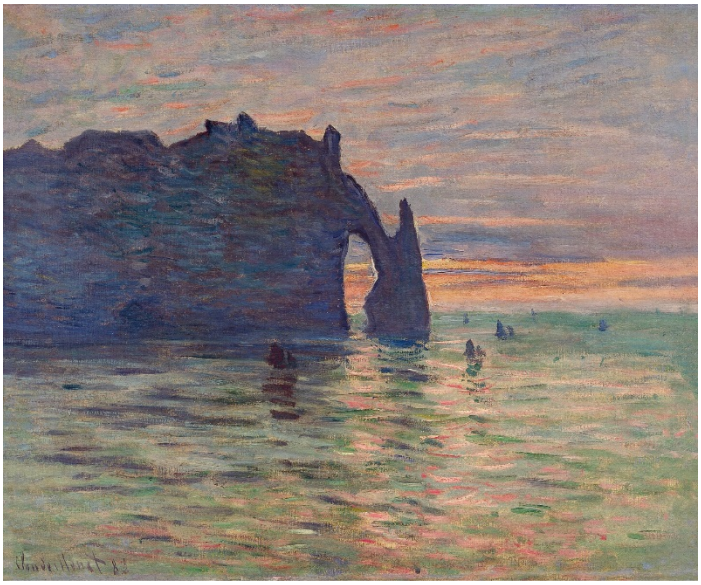

Figure 14

Monet, *Soleil couchant à Etretat*, 1883, canvas, 60 x 73 cm, Musée des Beaux-Arts de Nancy.

The magical reflections of the colours of light are represented as a softened presence, comparable to the toned down colours in Monet's *Soleil couchant à Etretat* (figure 14), where the casual strokes of mild colours loosely interlaced with one another produce an effect of a vibrant glimmering of the slightly agitated sea surface.

A more complicated vision of painterly texture is manifest in the protagonist's contemplation of Lake Geneva that reminds him of the sea in Beg-Meil:

> [R]ien n'était plus confondu, ici flottant une couleur, une autre là; comme une huile nageant ici, et là-bas l'eau était comme sèche. (*JS*, p. 398)

Figure 15

Whistler, *Symphony in Grey: Early Morning, Thames*, c. 1871, canvas, 45.7 x 67.5 cm, Freer Gallery of Art, Washington, DC.

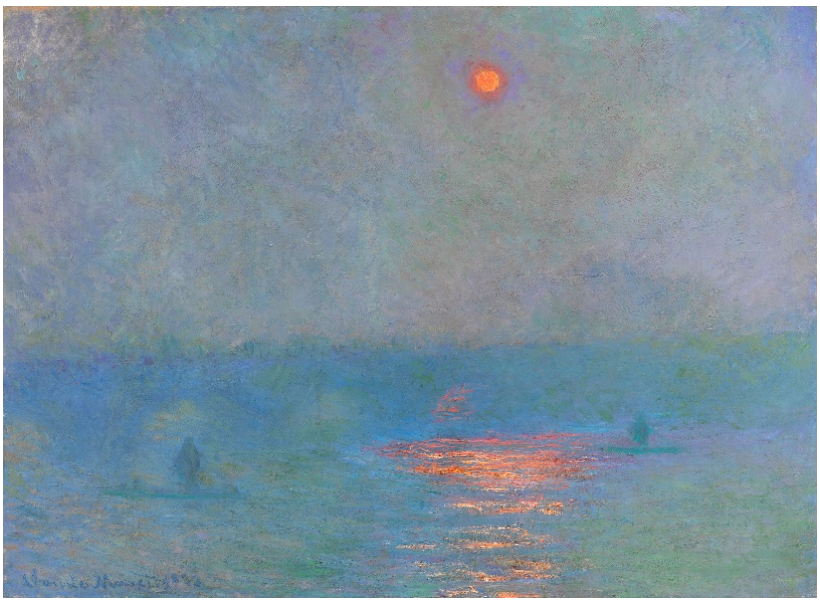

Figure 16

Monet, *Waterloo Bridge: le soleil dans le brouillard*, 1903, 73.7 x 100.3 cm, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa.

Here Proust alludes to the texture of oil and dryness in a painting, representing two different styles of paint preparation, for example, those respectively seen in Whistler's *Nocturne: Blue and Silver – Chelsea* (figure 8) and *Symphony in Grey: Early Morning, Thames* (figure 15). The hybrid aesthetic of such a vision is also manifest in Monet's *Waterloo Bridge: le soleil dans le brouillard* (figure 16) that presents a contrast between the glaring and oily texture of the reflection of sunlight centring the tableau and the muted dryer blues of the rest of the composition.

1.2.2 Linear brushstrokes and hardness in Whistler

Just before the sentences quoted above, Proust gives an account of a particular status of the sea that echoes the aesthetic of Whistler:

> et à tous moments au bout des champs on voyait la mer dans un si grand repos qu'elle ne prenait même pas la peine d'effacer le sillage des bateaux, de sorte que, immobiles çà et là, ils semblaient avoir laissé pendre derrière eux un long cordage, peut-être être au bout d'une sorte de chaine, peut-être rester échoués dans une sorte d'ornière de la mer qui paraissait là plus basse, comme ensablée. (*JS*, p. 397)

The 'grand repos' of the water is depicted by Proust through an illusion of the stillness of the boats, which is equally a significant motif in most of Whistler's *Nocturnes*. In Whistler's works such as *Nocturne: Blue and Silver – Chelsea*, *Symphony in Grey: Early Morning, Thames*, and *Nocturne: Blue and Silver - Cremorne Lights*, the slim shapes of the boats follow the almost imperceptible ripples of water created by the linear horizontal strokes, leaving an impression that seamlessly accords with Proust's metaphors of 'un long cordage' and 'une sorte de chaîne'.[48]

[48] *JS*, p. 397.

The use of a 'minimum number of decisive strokes' acquired from Japanese woodcuts and Chinese porcelains, as Holden comments,[49] conveys a sense of serenity that is almost Oriental, similarly present in Proust's text.

Another depiction in *Jean Santeuil* (quoted previously) of the quasi-immobility further foregrounds the texture of water that resembles the surface of a painting:

> Seulement, longtemps après le coucher du soleil, quand il faisait déjà nuit sur la mer qui était de la couleur bleu gris d'un maquereau, si dure que les barques semblaient la couper et que çà et là elle paraissait plutôt un grand banc de sable. (*JS*, p. 211)

Figure 17

Whistler, *Nocturne: Blue and Silver - Cremorne Lights*, 1872, 50.2 x 74.3 cm, Tate, London.

[49] Holden, *Whistler Landscapes and Seascapes*, p. 28.

Not just the colour in Proust's depiction here resembles the careful choice of Whistler, there is also the appearance of a surface which is 'si dure', reflecting a solidity and uniformity of actual paintings of the latter, particularly those in *Nocturne: Blue and Silver - Cremorne Lights* (figure 17). In this painting, the simple line of the boat, just as Proust's expression of 'couper', divides the canvas into blocks of pure masses of paint, as pointed out by Holden, often applied by Whistler with housepainter's brushes in a way that anticipates the colour brands of Mark Rothko.[50]

1.2.3 Waves in curled brushstrokes reminiscent of Monet

Concerning the particular manner of painterly work on a tableau, the perception of the sea in the young Proust also evinces its resemblance to the brushstrokes that depict the moving surface of the sea in Monet. For instance, in recalling an experience of seeing the sea from the cliffs in a bright summer afternoon, Proust's protagonist in *Jean Santeuil* thus explains his vision (as previously quoted):

> [Q]uand nos yeux s'enchantent de tout le soleil dissous dans la mer en riches nuances bleues, prenant par surcroît celui qui y étincelle en brillantes paillettes lumineuses. (*JS*, p. 531)

The reflections in 'riches nuances bleues' gain a vivid presence in Proust's description of their forms through the expression of 'brillantes paillettes lumineuses', creating a glittering effect through the accumulation of the countless little strokes in a variety of blues. Such an expression coincides with Monet's signature treatment of the sea surface in slightly windy weathers, which is prototypically shown in *La Manneporte,*

[50] Holden, *Whistler Landscapes and Seascapes*, p. 52.

marée haute (figure 18), the lower part of which is composed of an interweaved pattern of short and curled brushstrokes that manifest a similar glittering appearance. The visible traces of such brushstrokes break with the traditional over-polished treatment in seascapes that Zola condemned for their 'stupid transparency' and 'fake reflections', and provide one of the reasons why Monet remains 'one the only painters who knows how to paint water' for Zola, who identifies the living and true quality in his paintings of the sea.[51]

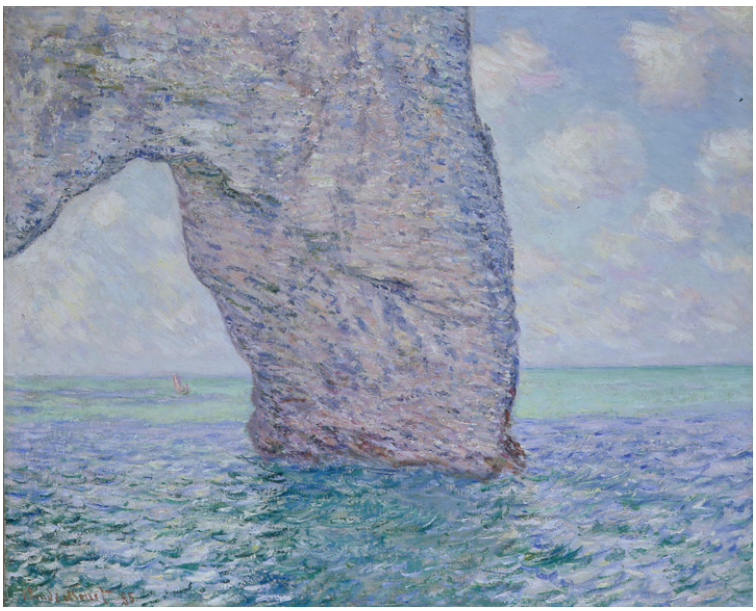

Figure 18

Monet, *La Manneporte, marée haute*, 1885, canvas, 66 x 82 cm, private collection.

[51] Cit. by Roquebert, 'Seascapes in Normandy', p. 100.

Furthermore, another slightly varied form of the waves is greatly elaborated in a painterly way in Proust's depiction of the Seine that converges with the protagonist's memory of the sea:

> Et cette eau couverte de soleil et pourtant fraîche venant baigner le sable torride, il semblait à Jean en sentir à la fois le charme ici aux bords de la Seine en ce moment, et en ce même moment au bord de la mer sur le sable éblouissant et chaud près des petites vagues arrondies en cristal, comme autrefois dans les après-midi bleues quand il allait y tremper ses mains pour se mettre de l'eau fraîche sur le front, et quand dans le bruit de l'eau transparente qui se brisait sur les coquillages il lui semblait boire de la fraîcheur et étancher sa soif. Et ces milliers de petits flots qui se poussaient sur la rivière, qui jouaient et se mêlaient lui faisaient éprouver le même ravissement d'une vie innocente et aimable, alerte, joyeuse, infatigable, mais aussi douce, légère, petite comme une fossette ou une boucle, et infinie, qui ne se lassait jamais, se reprenait sans cesse, que lui faisait ressentir l'éternel frémissement de ces petites feuilles enflées, désenflées, contournées par la brise, mais tout le temps vernies, brillantes, dorées par le soleil, sous le ciel toujours aussi bleu, sans que les roucoulements d'oiseaux cessent à leur ombre. (*JS*, p. 771)

Figure 19

Monet, *Breaking Waves*, 1881, canvas, 60 x 81 cm, Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco.

The waves here are repeatedly emphasised by Proust as small, infinite as in 'milliers de petits flots' and especially in the shape 'arrondie', enhanced by the metaphor of 'une fossette ou une boucle'. These qualities, if perceived from a painterly perspective, could hardly be detached from the manner of Monet in the execution of round and repetitive brushstrokes that fill the canvas of seascapes with small waves. In works such as *Breaking Waves* (figure 19), the rings of brushstrokes receive such a pronounced treatment that the shape of the waves acquires an almost independent identity as the expression of the brush, pregnant with an abstract tendency that foregrounds the aesthetic value of the medium itself as equally seen in Proust.

1.2.4 Thickness and texture of paint

As Davide Vago comments, 'l'épaisseur' constitutes one of the two typical traits of colour range in Proust, and from a painterly perspective, such a tangible quality of paint persists in Proust's seascape descriptions.[52] The thick texture that resembles an exuberant surface of a painting is accentuated in the description of the stillness of the sea in *Les Plaisirs et les jours*:

> Des voiles blanches comme des [53] papillons seraient posées sur l'eau immobile, sans plus vouloir bouger, comme pâmées de chaleur. Ou bien la mer serait au contraire agitée, jaune sous le soleil comme un grand champ de boue, avec des soulèvements, qui de si loin paraîtraient fixés, couronnés d'une neige éblouissante. (*JS*, p. 144)

[52] Davide Vago, *Proust en couleur*, p. 80.

[53]

Apart from alluding to Whistler's tranquil depiction of water by using the simile of a butterfly,[54] the vision that perceives the turbulent sea from the distance as an immobile expanse that possesses the texture of 'un grand champs de boue',[55] which highly resembles the effect of spreading substantial paint on a painting support, like that in the study of water in Turner's *Sunset on the River* (figure 20) and Whistler's *Grey and Silver: Mist – Lifeboat* (figure 21). In these two works, instead of producing a smooth and flowing surface, the brushstrokes that sweep over the tableau are brief and broad, even with irregular angles at the ridge, rendering visible the mud-like texture of the painting, a quality celebrated by Proust in his description that evokes the painting process in its most animated way.

Figure 20

Turner, *Sunset on the River*, 1805, oil on mahogany veneer mounted onto wooden panel, 15.6 x 18.7 cm, Tate, London.

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[54] To sign his paintings, Whistler often places a signature in the shape of a butterfly at the corner of the tableau, which is likely known to Proust, who makes an explicit reference in the *Recherche* — 'Et parfois, sur le ciel et la mer uniformément gris, un peu de rose s'ajoutait avec un raffinement exquis cependant qu'un petit papillon qui s'était endormi au bas de la fenêtre semblait apposer avec ses ailes, au bas de cette "harmonie gris et rose" dans le goût de celles de Whistler, la signature favorite du maître de Chelsea'. *RTP*, II (1988), p. 163.

[55] *JS*, p. 144.

Figure 21

Whistler, *Grey and Silver: Mist – Lifeboat*, 1884, oil on board, 21.6 x 12.3 cm, Freer Gallery of Art, Washington DC.

1.3 Synesthesia

As analysed above, the sense of touch is naturally embedded in the various descriptions of the painting-like texture of the visual objects without the viewer actually touching the surface of the water. Such synesthetic correlations not only reveal a Merleau-Pontian understanding of the integral nature of the senses as 'ce Tout indivisible' (previously quoted),[56] but also betray a particular tendency of imitating the process of viewing a painting through emphasising the fundamental role of vision upon which the other senses are based. Such an experience is typically illustrated in the situation of an individual seeing the windy seascape in an interior space shielded by a glass wall in *Jean Santeuil*:

> Un autre, étendu dans la même position devant la grande baie vitrée qui [le] sépare seule de la plage et laisse entrer la lumière, le spectacle de la mer, sans laisser entrer le vent qui serait bien désagréable en ce moment, semble faire supporter plutôt à ses yeux, devant qui passent les couleurs, avivées par le soleil, de la mer bleue [et] verte, des voiles blanches, des paquebots noirs, de la fumée volatilisée dans le ciel, tout le plaisir passif que [son repos] est susceptible de goûter. Mais reçu dans les yeux, le plaisir se propage plus loin et va réveiller dans chaque sens d'autres plaisirs. Dans un recueillement aussi

[56] Merleau-Ponty, *Sens*, p. 26.

> profond que le fumeur, cet autre roi du festin croit sentir le vent qui fait claquer la flamme, ride la mer, enfle la voile. Partout les jeux de la lumière sont mêlés aux jeux du vent. Il croit entendre le cri des mouettes qui volent au-dessus de la jetée et trouver à ses lèvres le goût du sel. (*JS*, p. 287)

The particular environment of the viewing subject created by the glass filters out in principle all other sensory experiences (textile, audial, gustatory) from the vision, metaphorically reducing the perception of the seaside into a seascape painting. However, the glass wall fails to reduce the experience to a merely visual one. Therefore, the experience of receiving 'd'autres plaisirs' including the touch of wind, the cry of the seagulls and the taste of salt in such an environment correlates impeccably with the experience of synesthesia when seeing a painting, for example those of Monet such as *Breaking Waves* (figure 19) which inevitably evokes 'the noise and violence of the thrashing waves'.[57] In this way, the glass wall in Proust's ingeniously constructed situation mirrors the protecting glass of a piece of art work. Thus, if considered reversely, such a synesthetic experience in Proust also comments on a gallery experience, where the viewer in front of the glass-covered art work, like the individual in Proust's text, perceives an integral sensory combination of sound, touch, and taste as if the glass in-between were only a mediator to another world, and therefore reveals a phenomenological force of the primordiality that also affects the creative process, to use Merleau-Ponty's terms.[58]

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[57] Richard Thomson and Michael Clarke, *Monet: The Seine and the Sea 1878-1883* (Edinburgh: National Galleries of Scotland, 2003), p. 102.

[58] As previously mentioned in Chapter 1, Merleau-Ponty underlines the integral nature of a primordial mode before the division of senses by logic, which the artists re-enact in artistic creation, pointing out that Cézanne considers 'un tableau contient en lui-même jusqu'à l'odeur du paysage'. *PP*, p. 368.

2.1 The Lack of topographical detail

As Tsumori points out, the spatial descriptions of seascapes in *Jean Santeuil*, with the exception of a short portrayal of the 'presque-île' of Beg-Meil that corresponds to the topographic reality,[59] are embedded with an intention to 'représenter un paysage comme un tableau', which is to say, without much geographical specificity, the depictions of Proust introduce a 'paysage abstrait'.[60] Unsurprisingly, such a tendency is also the significant characteristic of the depictions of water and sky in Turner, Monet, and Whistler.

Figure 22

Turner, *Honfleur, Normandy from the West*, c. 1832, gouache and watercolour on paper, 14.1 x 19.2 cm, Tate, London.

[59] *JS*, p. 361.

[60] Tsumori, *Proust et le paysage*, pp. 90-91.

Figure 23

Turner, *Seascape with Storm Coming On*, c. 1840, canvas, 91.4 x 121.6 cm, Tate, London.

Parallel to the transition of style in Turner's use of colour as mentioned in the previous section, his spatial description also underwent a marked difference around 1835 when he finished with the commissions of specific geographical depictions in watercolour and begun to abandon topographical accuracy for a better capture of the poetic essence in his vision. For instance, the stylistic contrast can be seen in *Honfleur, Normandy from the West* (figure 22) and *Seascape with Storm Coming On* (figure 23) that were painted before and after this period respectively. The former provides a detailed depiction of the bay of Honfleur with abundant meticulous treatments of the buildings, ships and land that approximate to the water, while the latter, presenting a vision in the middle of the sea and composed of expressive colour masses, manifests no attention of locating the subject of the painting in any geographical specific environment.

Figure 24

Monet, *The Sea at Fécamp*, 1881, canvas, 65.5 x 82 cm, Staatsgalerie, Stuttgart.

Figure 25

Claude Monet, *Marine near Étretat*, 1882, canvas, 54.6 x 73.8 cm, Philadelphia Museum of Art.

Similarly, topographical depiction is neither a concern for Monet, who, in showing a preference for Fécamp and Pourville instead of the busy commercial centres like Le Havre and Rouen as his seascape subjects, as Thomson underlines, is 'confronted by pure nature' and endowed with a freedom to 'focus more closely on

the waves themselves'.[61] Such a dedication to the dynamics and the charms of the water is typically seen in *The Sea at Fécamp* (figure 24) and *Marine near Étretat* (figure 25), of which no topographical indication is given except for the title, just as Proust does in his seascape depictions as previously analysed, where the shapes of the waves and the colour composition of water and atmosphere receive an utmost absorptive gaze.

Figure 26

Whistler, *Nocturne: Grey and Gold, Westminster Bridge*, c. 1871–1872, canvas, 71 x 86.4 cm, The Burrell Collection, Glasgow.

The lack of topographical specificity in Whistler's *Nocturnes* is similarly evident, to the extent it was one of the central subjects of disagreement in the dispute between Whistler and his severe critics, one of whom as previously mentioned, was Ruskin. Whistler, whose *Nocturnes* such as *Nocturne: Grey and Gold, Westminster Bridge* (figure 26) as MacDonald suggests, witness a shift of emphasis

[61] Thomson, *Monet: The Seine and the Sea 1878-1883*, p.102.

'from on-site accuracy to colour and atmosphere', defended himself in the trial against Ruskin by insisting on his scheme of placing the importance of artistic interest before the 'outside anecdotal interest' of an art work.[62] As can be observed in *Nocturne: Grey and Gold, Westminster Bridge* as well as *Nocturne: Blue and Silver – Chelsea* (figure 8), the artist is 'close to abandoning topological detail entirely' as de Montfort points out, while retaining the phenomenological quality of the water and the air themselves.[63] Likewise, in *Jean Santeuil*, be it in the description of Beg-Meil, the Seine or Lake Geneva, the focus of the Proustian vision is always the water itself, instead of the surrounding geographical markers that have nothing to do with the dynamics of the arrangement of colour and form like those in the *Nocturnes*.

2.2 Spatial isolation

The lack of topographical specificity as mentioned above, also largely contributes to a spatial perception that underlines the isolation of the place in which the viewing subject is situated. In Proust, the spatial description of the seaside demonstrates an appreciation of the sense of isolation just as with the emphasis on the detachment of the valley analysed in the previous chapter. Such an intention is typically illustrated by a reading experience of Jean and his companion Henri in Beg-Meil in *Jean Santeuil*:

> Pour lire et pour ne pas se gêner ils se mettaient à quelque distance l'un de l'autre, et, grâce aux replis de la dune, quelquefois en n'étant qu'à quelques pas l'un de l'autre, ils ne s'apercevaient pas, cachés par un pli de la dune et

[62] MacDonald and Monfort, 'Whistler and the Thames', p. 29.

[63] Ibid., p. 32.

> chacun pouvait se croire isolé de tout être humain, ne voyant au-dessus du sable que le ciel et la mer et les mouettes qui ne cessaient de voler. (*JS*, p. 366)

The particular spatial structure depicted not only creates a distance from the social environment for the protagonist and his companion, but also separates them from one another, resulting in a perception of the seaside space through total solitude. The predilection for an isolated space is similarly manifest in Monet's practice. By choosing a spot segregated from the crowd, such as depicted in *The Sea at Fécamp* (figure 24), he indulges himself in a complete personal exposure to nature. In his works that reveal an exclusive view of the sea, like in Turner, as Jeremy Lewison comments, through the elimination of most of the external spatial elements, the viewer himself becomes his 'only point of reference'.[64]

Figure 27

Whistler, *Sea and Rain*, 1865, canvas, 100.3 x 77.4 cm, University of Michigan Museum of Art.

[64] Jeremy Lewison, *Turner Monet Twombly: Later Paintings* (London: Tate Gallery Publ., 2012), p. 53.

Likewise, for Whistler, differing from his predecessors such as Boudin and Courbet who depict the seaside in a way that includes either social activities or realistic details of human presence, the vision of the seaside contains a strong sense of detachment from society, embracing a space that belongs exclusively to a single individual. For example, in *Sea and Rain* (figure 27) which Frances Spalding contrasts with Courbet's *The Seaside at Palavas* where a figure is depicted as waving at the sea,[65] the figure is small and 'dematerialised' without a specific gesture or much detailed treatment.[66] Such a vision of an isolated space, similar to those in Turner and Monet, minimalising all historical, anecdotal, or moral indications, coincides with the Proustian poetics that delivers an openness to the sea in its purest existence.

2.3 Immensity and the aesthetic of the sublime

The reduction of external details and the sense of isolation as seen in the depiction of water and air in Proust and the three artists, inevitably create an effect of spatial expansion, towards which, as early as *Les Plaisirs et les jours*, the young Proust shows a particular preference in a depiction of joy which is compared to

> épancher mon bonheur de sentir en moi toute cette vie prête à jaillir, à s'étendre à l'infini, dans des perspectives plus vastes et plus enchanteresses que l'extrême horizon des forêts et du ciel que j'aurais voulu atteindre d'un seul bond. (*JS*, p. 89)

[65] Courbet, *The Seaside at Palavas*, 1854, canvas, 39 x 46 cm, Musée Fabre, Montpellier.

[66] Frances Spalding, *Whistler* (Ann Arbor, MI: Phaidon Press, 1979), p. 60.

The infinity of space is visualised through the narrator's yearning for reaching the vast and distant horizon, which in *Jean Santeuil*, continues to be an essential element for the aesthetic of immensity:

> Les pâturages où les vaches paissaient côte à côte [dans] la lumière du soir, les bois, les maisons, les chemins descendaient au loin, assez raides pour que Jean pût voir l'horizon tout entier. (*JS*, p. 363)

Figure 28

Turner, *Sunset*, c. 1830–5, canvas, 66.7 x 81.9 cm, Tate, London.

The distant landscape presents a 'raide' horizon in its entirety in Proust's verbal landscape painting, demonstrating a vision that approximates to the characteristic spatial compositions in Turner and Whistler, evident for example in *Sunset* (figure 28) where the sweeping horizontal lines depict the strands of warm colour from the sunset, and in *Sea and Rain* (figure 27) that defines a spatial infinity through a misty line of a distant horizon.

In the narratives of *Jean Santeuil*, the poetics of spatial infinity is conveyed through a set of metaphors that depict the mental state of loss in Mme Santeuil:

> Mme Santeuil voyait le ciel innombrable, se noyait dans la rêverie vague où nous plonge une peinture immense, une inscription éclatante et indéchiffrable que nous ne comprenons pas, et cherchait dans la voie lactée l'astre aussi vague, aussi brillant, aussi lointain de son cher Jean. (*JS*, p. 204)

Figure 29

Whistler, *The Angry Sea*, 1884, canvas, 12.38 x 21.59 cm, Freer Gallery of Art, Washington.

To illustrate the vagueness and unfathomability of Mme Santeuil's longing, dreamy gaze, Proust utilises a juxtaposition of the immensity of the sky and the image of a large painting, together with the incomprehensible inscription and the milky way, in a manner that foregrounds the vastness less on a level of actual dimension and more on the enigmatic dynamics of spatial potential. Similarly, spatial immensity is depicted by Turner and Whistler with a masterful expressiveness that perfectly incorporates spatial expansion within the limited size of painting. In Whistler's *The Angry Sea* (figure 29) which is only 12.38 x 21.59 cm, the thin line of the sea and the brief brushstrokes of the waves in their vague and slightly nuanced shapes

summarise the vast width and depth of the visual field, corresponding admirably to Walter Sickert's comments, '[h]e will give you in the space of nine inches by four an angry sea, piled up, and running in, as no painter ever did before'.[67] And the later paintings of Turner that depict the sea and the sky, in spite of being often only three feet high by four feet wide, excel in producing a 'limitless' scale, in front of which the viewer fully experiences the loss against the 'evanescent immensity of the natural world',[68] echoing the sublime aesthetic of the late eighteenth century and the first half of the nineteenth century explicated by Edmund Burke.[69] The poetics of the sublime, as Thomson argues, continues in Monet's seascapes as a 'Modern Sublime' that pushes the viewer close to the boundlessness of the seaside space.[70]

[67] Spalding, *Whistler*, p. 64.

[68] Francis, 'Not Dark Yet: Turner in the Year 2000', p. 12.

[69] Riding, *Turner & the Sea*, p. 26.

[70] Thomson, *Monet: The Seine and the Sea 1878-1883*, p. 29.

2.4 An embodied perception of space

The openness to the spatial isolation and the sublime immensity of the sea and the sky in Proust often indicate a participatoty role for the viewer, which is expressed in the desire to '[se] pench[er] vers les choses' in the natural world as the protagonist confesses in *Jean Santeuil*, who, in the early morning, journeys for hours to see the storm at the seaside in Penmarch.[71] The genuine enthusiasm for involvement in the midst of the turbulent space of the sea reveals the essential role of the body in spatial comprehension. Situating a perceiving body inside a spatial structure, to live the structure in Merleau-Ponty's terms, similarly characterises the vision of Turner and Monet especially in their late works.[72]

Figure 30

Turner, *Snow Storm - Steam-Boat off a Harbour's Mouth*, exhibited 1842, canvas, 91.4 x 121.9 cm, Tate, London.

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[71] *JS*, p. 369.

[72] 'Avoir l'expérience d'une structure, ce n'est pas la recevoir passivement en soi: c'est la vivre, la reprendre, l'assumer, en retrouver le sens immanent'. *PP*, p. 299.

Figure 31

Turner, *Seascape*, c. 1835-40, canvas, 90.2 x 121 cm, Tate, London.

The intention of bodily implicating himself into the space of the sea is already visible in the title that Turner gives to his work 'Snowstorm-Steam-Boat off a Harbour's Mouth making Signals in Shallow Water, and going by the Lead. The Author was in this Storm on the Night the Ariel left Harwich' (figure 30). By emphasising that the author was in this storm, Turner refuses all presumptions of a fabrication or a mere disinterested observation like in his early practice, and the work indeed presents an authentic vision that could not be portrayed otherwise than through a real involvement of the body.[73] The way of spatial depiction in Turner that eliminates external references as previously mentioned, the engulfing space created by the swirls of black and white brushstrokes and the oval structure that imitates the dynamics of human vision all contribute to a 'well engraved' perception, to use Ruskin's words. Ruskin observes that 'Turner always places the spectator, not on the

[73] Lewison, *Turner Monet Twombly*, p. 53.

shore, but twenty or thirty yards from it, beyond the first range of the breakers'.[74] Such a choice, seen for example in *Seascape* (figure 31), by situating the viewer away from the shore, reveals a vision that dissolves into the complete immensity of the sky and the sea. Similarly, many of Monet's depictions of the sea and the sky, such as *The Sea at Fécamp* (figure 24), with an angle that 'penche' towards the sea, as Thomson argues, implicate the spectator as a protagonist who experiences the pure natural forces in the spatial expansion, as does the protagonist in *Jean Santeuil* who aspires to lose himself in the storming sea.[75]

[74] John Ruskin, J. M. W. Turner, and Dinah Birch, *Ruskin on Turner* (London: Cassell, 1990), p. 47.

[75] Thomson, *Monet: The Seine and the Sea 1878-1883*, p. 104.

2.5 Imperfect spatial composition

Apart from the expansion of space in the vision of sea and water, another spatial experience that primarily reveals a bodily engagement in Proust is manifest through the invisibility caused by obstacles in the visual field. For instance, as Jean-Pierre Richard points out, the light in Proust is often portrayed indirectly through reflections, as could be seen in the invisibility of the sun depicted in the riverside of Beg-Meil in *Jean Santeuil*:

> [L]'azur tremblant et rose du sable mouillé, les vives couleurs du ciel, la nacre riche et changeante de la baie, un éclair d'or ou un paysage lumineux dans la fenêtre d'une chaumière, les maisons de l'autre rive rouges comme au lever du jour, semblent apporter les échos affaiblis et étouffés du soleil invisible et prochain et préparer le règne de sa gloire. (*JS*, p. 364)

Through laying an emphasis on the aesthetic value of the reflected colour indicating the hidden sun, the depiction reveals a predilection for an inexplicitness in vision, implying an involvement in a particular spatial situation where other invisible layers of the structure are perceived through presumption, a vision reminiscent of Monet's *Waterloo Bridge* (figure 6), where the flickering reflections of the sunset on the river evoke the presence of the invisible sun.

The perception of a multiple-layered spatial structure where the invisibility caused by obstacles retains an essential aesthetic value is also manifest in Proust's emphasis on the process of a perceiving experience that evokes anticipation. Such a vision is well illustrated by the depiction of the sea storm that the protagonist in *Jean Santeuil*, having not yet arrived at the shore, anticipates through the fleeting foams:

> On n'apercevait pas la mer qui était encore à deux lieues, mais à tous moments on rencontrait des flocons d'écume filant sur les terres avec une vitesse incroyable, comme ces fuyards ou ces officiers en reconnaissance qui,

> passant à bride abattue, indiquent qu'on est bien sur le chemin de la grande bataille qu'on ne voit pas encore. (*JS*, p. 374)

Proust constructs here a blocked vision of the sea that intrigues even more effectively a wider presumption of space through an animated metaphor of the flying foams of the sea as fugitives or military officials that announce a great war awaiting the protagonist. The majestic nature of the hidden sea which is given away through subtle visual hints indicates a stylistic predilection that is almost Oriental. As Jan Hokenson suggests, Proust, whose knowledge of Japanese arts far exceeds the superficiality of a dilettante, incorporates Japanese philosophy on various levels in his writing.[76] The aesthetic of inexplicit vision, for example, constantly embraced by ukiyo-e (Japanese woodblock prints) with its often 'imperfect'composition of space, could also be observed in Proust's depiction of a pleasant moment at the Réveillons's:

> À tous moments retentissaient des coups de fusil, et les laboureurs s'arrêtaient pour les écouter avec cette gaieté que nous éprouvons par sympathie en pensant aux plaisirs des autres quand ne s'y mêle pas l'envie d'en jouir plus directement. Quelquefois la lumière plongeait sous les nuages, mais à l'autre bout de l'horizon on l'apercevait déjà émergée jouant sur une colline ensoleillée sous un ciel pur. (*JS*, p. 515)

The juxtaposition of two seemingly irrelevant sequences reveals a subtle aesthetic convergence: the pleasure of hunting with which the labourers sympathise without the aspiration for a direct experience echoes the view of the hidden sun that announces its presence by indirectly illuminating a distant hill. The incomplete vision

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[76] Jan Hokenson, 'Proust's "japonisme": Contrastive Aesthetics', *Modern Language Studies*, 29 (1999), 17-37.

of the latter comes close to the spatial arrangement in ukiyo-e such as in *Original Fuji, Meguro* (figure 32).

Figure 32

Hiroshige, *Original Fuji, Meguro (Meguro Moto-Fuji)*, 1857, Woodblock print (nishiki-e); ink and color on paper, 35.7 x 24.5 cm, Musem of Fine Arts Boston.

Figure 33

Monet, *Fishing nets at Pourville*, 1882, 86.1 x 106.9 cm, canvas, Gemeentemuseum Den Haag.

Figure 34

Utagawa Kuniyoshi (1797-1861), *View of Mt. Fuji*.[77]

[77] <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Kuniyoshi_Utagawa,_View_of_Mt_Fuji_2.jpg> [accessed 1 May 2017].

A similar poetics of space is often adopted by Monet in his seascapes, among which is *Fishing nets at Pourville* (figure 33), where the veil that occupies the majority of the canvas explicitly pays homage to Utagawa Kuniyoshi's *View of Mt. Fuji* (figure 34). As Thomson points out, Monet's Normandy paintings, by frequently refusing to avoid obstacles in the visual field, present 'not just [...] a landscape seen, but a landscape experienced',[78] and such a manner of portrayal displays a particularly modern way of looking that 'subvert[s] stale pictorial nostrums about composition, particularly the established convention that the artist/spectator was given a privileged and uncluttered view of the painting's subject'.[79] The modern way of looking that to a certain extent coincides with the Oriental aesthetics in Proust and Monet, recognises a spatial perception that relies on the experience that visualises and 'lives' a spatial structure, as Merleau-Ponty suggests, by the presumption of a moving body.[80]

[78] Thomson, 'Looking to Paint: Monet 1878-1883', p.19.

[79] Ibid., p.21.

[80] *PP*, pp. 235-36.

2.6 Particularity of a place and personification

The spatial perception of the water and sky in Proust, similar to the vision of the valleys and woods analysed in the previous chapter, evinces a co-existence of two seemingly opposing comprehensions of space: one being dwellable locations that are walked through, the other presented as a personalised being to be contemplated. The gaze towards the sea and the clouds as if they were human beings is often seen in Proust's early essays and poems, for example the simile that associates the purity of the sea and the sky with the look of a person:

> Depuis quelques jours on peut contempler le calme de la mer dans le ciel redevenu pur, comme on contemple une âme dans un regard.[81]

Also, the empty, pale and melancholic appearance of a lover's eyes is closely observed and compared repeatedly in detail to the sorrowful colour of the sky:

> La douceur du ciel bleu sourit au cœur aimant.
> Si le bleu de tes yeux est triste
> Comme un doux regret qui persiste,
> Est-ce d'aimer ce qui n'existe
> Pas en ce monde? Aimer est triste.
> Tes yeux vagues, tes yeux avides,
> Tes yeux profonds hélas! sont vides;
> Profonds et vides sont les cieux,
> Et la tendresse du bleu pâle
> Est un mensonge dans l'opale
> Et dans le ciel et dans tes yeux. (*CSB*, p. 367)

The correlation between the sky with the look of a person despite their drastic difference in dimension, reveals the relationship between the viewing subject and the vast areas of atmosphere perceived as less of a passive visual reception but more of an interactive connection, where the viewer longs for the returned gaze from the

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[81] *MR*, p. 133.

object. In Proust's early meditation on the clouds, they are further involved in a conversation with the narrator — 'Ô beaux nuages, combien vous avez entendu d'aveux que vous n'avez pas répétés'.[82] Such a portrayal of the sea and the sky, differing from a simple rhetorical borrowing of an image, reveals a sincere intention to understand the space as a thinking subject. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the independent nature of the personalised objects is conveyed through grasping their 'manière d'habiter le monde' instead of their mere resemblance in colour and shape.[83] The deep attachment of the viewer to the water and atmosphere that is expressed in such a perception in Proust shows a great affinity with Monet who returns several times to paint the seaside of Fécamps, with an enthusiasm that treats the place as a much loved acquaintance.

It is interesting to note that, in order to foreground the particularity of a certain seaside location and scenery, Proust introduces and elaborately explains in *Jean Santeuil* the notion of the physiognomy of a place. For instance, he suggests that

> [l]es lieux sont des personnes à qui l'humanité qui est en nous a donné une physionomie — non pas humaine, car c'est une physionomie de lieux, mais une physionomie de personne, de personne qui se configure avec une cathédrale sur une falaise, un enfoncement d'estuaire dans le lointain, des champs surélevés quand on sort dans la campagne après la petite ville. (*JS*, p. 535)

Proposing a new definition of the physiognomy for places, Proust correlates the perception of a place with the understanding of a person. Through references to the

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[82] *CSB*, p. 329.

[83] Merleau-Ponty, *Signes*, p. 68.

seaside places as 'personnes' and 'figures',[84] attention is drawn to the particularity of a certain place, which not only involves its specific geographical character as mentioned above, but also touches upon a more integral perception like that of a person, as Proust emphasises in the protagonist's meditation on the wind reminiscent of Beg-Meil:

> Oui, par ce vent qui nous en parle, nous voudrions bien y aller à ces plages, non point à telle ou telle autre qui leur ressemble, mais à celle-là dont le soulèvement de granit à gauche, puis la petite ligne de rochers, le long défilé où passent des barques, dessinent la physionomie. Car il ne s'agit pas de qualités, ou de ressemblances, les lieux sont des personnes et nous savons que toutes les plus belles choses de la terre ne nous donneraient pas ce que le vent nous fait en ce moment tellement désirer, aller à ***. (*JS*, p. 534)

It is clear that the term 'physionomie' does not designate a mechanical resemblance of appearance, but is related with a profound perception of a person based on his/her overall characteristics that define himself/herself as irreplaceable, as Proust reemphasises as the 'physionomie qui font que rien ne nous les remplace'.[85] Such a deep connection with water can also be seen in Whistler, whose *Nocturnes*, notwithstanding their topographical ambiguity, aptly reveal 'an intimate knowledge of the locality from which they derive', as de Montfort suggests.[86] Although the stylistic treatment of the Thames in these *Nocturnes* inevitably contains an element of abstraction, the grasp of the poetic nature of the scenery and the affection for the place are unquestionably specific. Whistler writes to his follower Walter Greaves, who lived by the Thames and had originally been trained as a boatman: 'I hoped to

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[84] *JS*, p. 535.

[85] Ibid.

[86] Macdonald, *An American in London: Whistler and the Thames*, p. 32.

be able to find some grand greys and great masses of waves that I might spread over a couple of small canvasses with the true waterman's jerk', referring to a painting technique that belongs particularly to the painters of the Thames.[87]

A deeper understanding of the physiognomy of a place is expressed in the protagonist's crisis of recognition in front of the unfamiliar beach with familiar waves in *Jean Santeuil*:

> C'était une plage où jamais de sa vie il n'était venu, une mer qu'il ne connaissait pas, où tout lui donnait l'impression de l'étranger, et pourtant ces petites vagues il les connaissait. […] Mais pourtant il les reconnaissait: c'étaient bien les mêmes qu'il avait vues tant de milliers de fois, sur la Manche, dans tant de plages qu'il connaissait. Leur forme, leur mouvement, leur enchaînement l'une à l'autre formaient cette physionomie qui fait que les choses nous affirment qu'elles sont les mêmes, que nous les connaissons. Aussi avait-il à cette tombée de la nuit cette triste impression, plus triste peut-être que de ne pas reconnaître des choses que nous connaissons: c'était un peu de reconnaître des choses que nous ne connaissons pas, mais surtout c'était de ne pas être reconnu de choses que nous connaissons, de les sentir devenues étrangères. (*JS*, p. 393)

The perception of the dynamics of 'leur forme, leur mouvement, leur enchaînement l'une à l'autre' awakens the protagonist's memory precisely in the way of someone recognising a familiar person. However, such recognition is only partial since the place only shares a few commonalities with the beach of the protagonist's childhood, which disagrees with the irreplaceability of the overall perception of a person. The sorrow resulting from such a crisis, as stressed by Proust, is largely due to the protagonist's impression that his recognition is not returned, which further indicates that the perception of space is of a mutual and interactive nature, recalling Merleau-

[87] Ibid., p. 28.

Ponty's observation of the situation where the painters feel 'regardé[s] par les choses' as quoted previously in Chapter 2.[88]

Treating the seaside space as a person in such an interactive mode where the protagonist expects a returned gaze, is but another form of the merging of the world with the body in Merleau-Ponty's terms. The blurring of the boundary between the seeing and the seen reflects the dissolving of the subject-object dichotomy in the bodily context, which is further demonstrated in the metaphor that illustrates the visual indistinctness of the viewer who lowers his eyelid when seeing the sea and sky in *Jean Santeuil* as quoted previously:

> Ce qu'il voit, c'est de la lumière seule qui a réussi à passer mais en devant renoncer à apporter avec elle le spectacle des choses. Cette lumière est délicatement rose, blanche, dorée, sans qu'il sache si c'est la couleur de l'atmosphère ou la couleur de ses paupières, comme ce bruit que nous entendons quand nous approchons un coquillage de notre oreille, si vague que nous ne savons pas s'il vient du coquillage ou de notre oreille. (*JS*, p. 287)

By closely associating the perception of the outside (atmosphere on the sea, sound of the seashell) and parts of the perceiving body (eyelids and ear), the metaphor ingeniously upsets interior and exterior space, just as Merleau-Ponty's well known example of the ambiguous relationship between the left and right hand that also explains the underlying poetics of the works of Turner, Monet, and Whistler, especially with regard to time and movement as will be analysed in the next section.[89]

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[88] *VI*, p. 183.

[89] In discussing 'le corps propre', Merleau-Ponty refers to the experience of the left hand and right hand touching together, in which the role of touching and touched are interchangeable. The complicated character of the body which functions both as an object and as a subject upsets the imagined clear

III Movement

Endowed with the fluid quality that expresses movement and transformation, water and air are manifest in the vision of Proust and Turner, Monet, and Whistler in the most multifaceted appearances. The movement depicted in Proust and the three painters covers a broad range of manners according to different measurements of time: firstly, for a relatively quieter water surface, the subtle movement of the sea or the river are perceived as vibration, namely the merging and interchanging of different areas of the visual fields and the echoing interior movement of the body integrated in the world; secondly, in the depiction of greater and more apparent movements, the storms at sea in particular, the vision of Proust and these artists converge in the modern development of the Romantic aesthetic of the sublime, and further through the predilection for the apocalyptic spectacle and the perpetually continuing process, they anticipate and illustrate the aesthetics of abstract art; thirdly, the movement of water and air from the perspective of a broader span of time interrogates the idea of memory which is powerful in transforming vision and is closely associated with the primordial perception grounded in the body, and further offering a ground for Proust's aspiration to transcend the limit of human perception of movement and time.

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boundary of the inside and outside of perception. see *PP*, p. 109.

3.1 Movement as vibration

3.1.1 Merging and radiation

Merleau-Ponty proposes an understanding of the movement perceived in a painting as 'un mouvement sans déplacement, par vibration ou rayonnement'.[90] The relatively static state of vibration and radiation reveals the profound integral relationship between the body and the world. Quoting Rodin, Merleau-Ponty states, 'toute chair, et même celle du monde, rayonne hors d'elle-même'.[91] The merging with the outside world of the body through vibration or radiation, as Lucia Angelino points out, is a form of primordial expression where the relatively still body abandons itself to an external movement that corresponds to some 'internal imprint' that is already inscribed in the body before the interference of logic and conscience.[92]

Such an energy that naturally dwells in the perceiving process of an art work illustrates the movement of the seascape depicted in the unique situation in *Jean Santeuil* as previously mentioned, where the satisfaction of a meal by the sea puts one into a delicious state of tiredness.[93] In an individual's reluctance to move, the seascape in the wind is perceived in a quasi-paralysed state which approximates an experience of contemplating a tableau in a gallery. Such a similarity, enhanced by the glass wall that excludes all other sensory elements apart from vision, conveys an

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[90] *ŒE*, p. 77.

[91] Ibid.

[92] Lucia Angelino, 'Drawing from Merleau-Ponty's Conception of Movement as Primordial Expression', *Research in Phenomenology*, 45.2 (2015), 288-302 (p. 290).

[93] *JS*, p. 287.

aesthetic of the subtlety that evokes an internal movement that awakens all other sensory perceptions in viewing a painting. The vision of the individual who lowers his eyelids, further depicts the blurring of boundaries and the ambiguity of perception due to such a vibration/radiation. It is worth noting that not only do the undefinable forms dissolve into merging colours of pink, white, and gold, but also the separation of the light and colour of the outside world from the body is hardly possible, expressing an intimate intertwining of the body and the world.

Figure 35

Turner, *Inverary Pier, Loch Fyne: Morning*, c. 1845, canvas, 91.4 x 121.9 cm, Yale Center for British Art, New Haven.

The perception of the subtle merging movement through vibration or radiation is often discernible in the works of Turner, whose understanding of colour and light resonates with the Merleau-Pontian integral nature of perception manifest in Proust. According to Turner, the lights in the form of transverse waves instead of longitudinal rays produce an infinite series of reflections that mingle with one another, creating a vision defined by the penetration of semi-transparent and blurry colour fields. For instance, in *Inverary Pier, Loch Fyne: Morning* (figure 35), the misty presence of the mountain and lake demonstrates a perpetual interlacing movement of radiation of light. Furthermore, the predilection of Turner for the warmer range of the colours yellow, orange, red and brown that dissolve into one another in a dreamy liquidity approximates the primordial state of flesh and blood, resembling the impression of the indistinct masses of light that are 'rose, blanche, dorée' in *Jean Santeuil* that mingle with the perception of the colour of one's eyelid.[94]

3.1.2 Transform and exchange

Another form of vibrating movement in Proust also emerges from the ambiguous perceiving process, typically in the misrecognition between the sea and the sky. In the early short essay 'Choses Normandes', Proust depicts such a situation where perplexity constitutes a major aesthetic focus:

> […] et de ses jardins il ne distingue plus le ciel et la mer qui se confondent. Il lui semble pourtant que cette ligne brillante les sépare: au-dessus c'est bien le ciel. C'est bien le ciel, cette légère ceinture d'azur pâle, et la mer mouille seulement ses franges d'or. Mais voici qu'un vaisseau l'écussonne, qui semble naviguer en plein ciel. (*MR.*, p. 134)

[94] Ibid., p. 288.

The view of the sky and the sea, although described as static in an objective sense, involves a dynamic that constantly disrupts the gaze of the viewer. The intimate relationship between the sea and the sky, further developed in the *Recherche* with Elstir's painting *Le Port de Carquethuit* which illustrates the notion of a metaphor that 'comparant la terre à la mer, supprimait entre elles toute démarcation',[95] reveals an almost Taoist understanding of the co-existence of Yin and Yang, the two primordial forces each containing the elements of the other, which allows for constant transformation and exchange, just as in describing the temperament of the sea, Proust frequently emphasises the dual character of 'force' and 'douceur'.[96]

In Whistler's work *Nocturne: Blue and Silver - Cremorne Lights* (figure 8), such a movement that dwells in the internal correlation is manifest in the indistinguishable state of the water and sky, the division of which is indicated merely by the slight sweep of a discontinued horizon. The echoing harmony in colour and the similar treatment in brushstroke evoke a perception of the inter-relationship of reflection and inversion of the two planes. Likewise, in Monet's *Waterloo Bridge* (figure 6), the boundary of water is rendered almost invisible through the rubbing intersections of brushstrokes within the same colour range. As Lewison comments, the stillness of the image in the painting does not impede a perception of movement in which the bridge constantly comes in and out of view.[97] The poetics of the merging and interchange in a seemingly still image of the sea and sky in Proust

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[95] *RTP*, II (1988), p. 192.

[96] *JS*, p. 369.

[97] Lewison, *Turner Monet Twombly*, p. 36.

anticipates the aesthetic of some of the colour field paintings in abstract art, especially those of Mark Rothko, whose *Untitled* (figure 36), for instance, introduces a dreamy state where the blurry borders of the colours reveal a potential for vibrating movement that compares and merges the two nuanced violet areas of the tableau, whereas the two masses of colour, bound by a chromatic affinity, like the water and sky dynamic in Proust and in Whistler and Monet, incessantly embrace each other, confusing the gaze of the viewer.

Figure 36

Mark Rothko, *Untitled*, 1949.

3.2 Gestural movement

3.2.1 The tradition of the sublime

The more evident mode of movement perceived in *Jean Santeuil* takes the form of a dramatic turbulence of the tempest at sea. Having mentioned in a letter to his friend Georges de Lauris that in Penn'marche 'une tempête est la plus sublime chose qui se puisse voir',[98] Proust dedicated a long section in *Jean Santeuil* to the protagonist's trip on an early morning to witness such a spectacle despite many warnings of danger. The protagonist's unrelenting wish to experience the power of nature to some extent demonstrates an almost Romantic predilection for the sublime. Such an aesthetic constituted of qualities such as pain, terror, unity, and succession, proposed by Edmund Burke in his *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, also exhibits a strong influence in Turner's works, especially his seascapes depicting shipwrecks and storms.[99]

In describing the violence of the natural forces of the tempest in *Jean Santeuil*, Proust presents a spectacular scene already preceding the confrontation with the sea:

> La violence de tout devenait de plus en plus incroyable. On ne distinguait pas au passage ce qui vous croisait en volant, tant cela volait vite. Sans voir la mer et à une lieue d'elle on recevait des paquets d'eau dans la figure. […] [I]ls entrèrent dans le royaume du vent dont ces collines défendaient l'entrée, et ils durent y entrer malgré eux à genoux. (*JS*, p. 374)

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[98] Cited by Vallès-Bled, *Proust et les peintres*, p. 386.

[99] Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987).

Figure 37

Turner, *Stormy Sea with Blazing Wreck*, c. 1835–40, canvas, 99.4 x 141.6 cm, Tate, London.

The visual murkiness in Proust's depiction expresses the exceptional speed of the incredible movement of the objects carried off by the wind. In the context of a tempest, the ambiguity of form and colour conveys precisely the terror embeded in the unclear and the movement extolled by Burke, which also marks one of the defining characters of the seascapes by Turner who himself admitted 'indistinctness is my faute'.[100] In his work such as *Stormy Sea with Blazing Wreck* (figure 37), the ship being devoured by the sea is hardly recognisable among the masses of water,

[100] *Autobiographical Recollections by the late Charles Robert Leslie, R. A.*, ed. by Tom Taylor (London: J. Murray, 1860), p. 138.

foam, rain, and fire in abstract traces of movement, the speed of which is depicted to such an extreme that everything is on the verge of losing its own form.

In the face of such a disastrous force, the protagonist and his company have to enter the realm of wind on their knees, the submissive implication of the position demonstrating a mental state far from the heroic temperament of the protagonists in traditional folklore narratives, just as Ruskin's comments on Turner's works that expresses an involvement of the viewer who is 'at the mercy of the sea than in triumph over it'.[101] Similarly for Monet, who seeks isolated and perilous places in the 1880s to fully experience the 'all-consuming astonishment, exhilaration, and even terror that the mind experiences when confronted with the awesome majesty and power of nature',[102] the works of the Seine and the sea manifest as Thomson suggests a 'modern sublime',[103] different from other Impressionist treatments of the sea, for instance those of Boudin who utilises the water and sky as a backdrop for the social scenes of the bourgeoisie.

3.2.2 Apocalyptic vision and abstraction

Apart from alluding to the sublime poetics of the power of nature, Proust from time to time expands his perspective of time and space to evoke a quasi-primordial sense of being in his depictions of a sea storm, the drama of which approaches a

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[101] Ruskin, *Ruskin on Turner*, p. 53.

[102] Monet, *Monet in Normandy*, p. 133.

[103] Thomson, 'Looking to Paint: Monet 1878-1883', p. 29.

'commencement du monde', or 'un combat de dieux'[104] that incurs a 'bouleversement des éléments'.[105] The inclination towards such a state of destruction before rebirth develops into a fundamental conception in artistic creation in the *Recherche* where the painter Elstir is considered by the narrator to be a kind of God who creates things in the world 'en leur ôtant leur noms, ou en leur en donnant un autre'.[106]

Figure 38

Turner, *Rough Sea*, c. 1840-1845, canvas, 91.4 x 121.9 cm, Tate, London.

[104] *JS*, p. 374.

[105] Ibid., p. 531.

[106] *RTP*, II (1988), p. 191.

The seascapes of Turner that pour out an atmosphere of apocalyptic disorder equally express the state of 'primal indeterminacy' which is commented by Jonathan Crary as 'a prelude to a new social and natural actuality'.[107] In his work *Rough Sea* (figure 38), paints of yellow, black, white, and red, conventionally used to represent specific forms of water, ship and smoke, are torn from their signifying confinement and liberated into an undefinable existence that sweeps, floats, and explodes as pure elements.

Figure 39

Cy Twombly, *Hero and Leandro* (To Christopher Marlowe), 1985, private collection.

The aesthetic of the primordial chaos of sea storms in Proust and Turner incorporates an anticipation of an Abstract Expressionist enthusiasm for disorder where forces meet and mix, such as in Cy Twombly's *Hero and Leandro* (figure 39)

[107] Jonathan Crary, 'The Blinding Light', in *J.M.W. Turner: The Sun is God*, p. 25.

that drastically renders an inundation of sea in abstraction. Proust particularly notices such an aesthetic potential of the sea, frequently in his essays celebrating its character of 'ne nous montrant rien de matériel', 'n'étant point à sa manière descriptive', but constantly exuding 'une volonté ambitieuse et défaillante'.[108] Such a 'volonté', could well be the undefinable that Monet seeks to capture in his seascapes, as he confesses 'the motif is unimportant to me, what I want to reproduce is what stands between the motif and me'.[109]

Figure 40

Turner, *A Harpooned Whale Surrounded by Small Boats* (?), c. 1845, 9.5 x 16.2 cm, Yale Center for British Art, New Haven.

[108] *MR*, p. 134.

[109] Quoted by Jeremy Lewison, *Turner Monet Twombly*, p. 112.

Figure 41

Zao Wou-ki(赵无极), *4.4.85*., canvas, 97 x 195 cm, private collection.

The immateriality of the 'volonté' of the sea appreciated by Proust, is also what allows Turner's works to 'transcend the historical circumstances of its production' as Richard Johns comments.[110] In particular, Turner's rapidly made sketches in watercolour which are often called 'Colour Beginning's[111] summon a formidable scenario of combating forces with only a few strokes of watercolour such as in *A Harpooned Whale Surrounded by Small Boats* (figure 40), the poetics of which is largely inherited in later abstract works such as Zao Wou-ki's *4.4.85* (figure 41) which portrays the burst of energy of coalescing streams of power.

[110] Riding, *Turner & the Sea*, p. 211.

[111] Ibid., p. 203.

3.2.3 Bodily engagement and the state of becoming

Having foregrounded the overpowering character of the sea storm and the chaotic state of vision, Proust further deepens the experience with a bodily engagement, as in the previously quoted paragraph he underlines that 'on recevait des paquets d'eau dans la figure',[112] and emphasises the servant's warning before departure:

> Et puis vous serez trempé jusqu'aux os. — Par la pluie? — Par la mer. Le vent emporte des morceaux de vagues jusqu'à une demi-lieue. (*JS*, p. 371)

The recurring accentuation of the experience of being fully soaked by the sea implies a total immersion of the body instead of an observation from a disinterested party, which, as previously mentioned with regard to spatial perception, is also one of the prominent characters of Turner's creativity that involves a 'well engraved'[113] spectator as Ruskin comments. Together with the apocalyptic indistinctness, the vision of the sea in Proust, Turner, and Monet approximates the idea of the primordial significance of the body which integrates itself in the movement of the world, providing a vivid example of Merleau-Ponty's idea of 'vivre dans la peinture' and 'respirer ce monde'.[114]

In describing the sea as a general phenomenon, Proust not only constantly maintains a perception of the duality or the multiplicity of its form and temperament, but also largely accentuates the quick and subtle changes of its appearance, noting that '[l]e pas d'un enfant sur l'eau y creuse un sillon profond

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[112] *JS*, p. 374.

[113] Ruskin, *Ruskin on Turner*, p. 47.

[114] Merleau-Ponty, *Signes*, p. 81.

avec un bruit clair'.[115] As Richard comments, the sea in Proust constitutes a place where 'la forme y sort de l'informité' and accounts for a number of metaphors associated with music.[116] The sea's forever changing physiognomy and the ephemeral impression appreciated by Proust manifest a predilection for the impromptu and fluid, which is similarly embraced by Turner who asserts 'I never lose an accident'.[117] The seascapes of Turner, executed in a manner that is open to changes and unpredictability that reflects precisely the fluctuating character of the sea, contain in themselves a dimension of time that depends on the movements of the scene depicted and the movements of the artist who depicts the scene.

Merleau-Ponty's meditation on the body, which liberates it from the confinement of the idea of an object, is fully grounded in the perception of movement, and the 'entrelac' between the body and the world further facilitates the perception of the body as no longer limited in form, but expanding and metamorphosing with all sorts of fluidity.[118] The predilection for the forming and unforming character of water and air in a fully engaged viewer in Proust, resonates with such an understanding of the moving and transforming potential of the body and also anticipates the embrace of a similar aesthetic of fluidity in other arts, for instance the improvised and natural flow of gestures in modern dance represented by Serge Diaghilev's Ballets Russes which Proust assimilates in the *Recherche*, as

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[115] *JS*, p. 143.

[116] Richard, *Proust et le monde sensible*, p. 107.

[117] Quoted by Lewison, *Turner Monet Twombly*, p. 34.

[118] *VI*, pp. 172-204.

Marion Schmid points out, reflecting a Dionysian aesthetic eulogised by Nietzsche.[119] The idea of the body in the Dionysian poetics that approximates to the Merleau-Pontian conception of the body as an element and a reservoir of intentions of movement also opens a dialogue with a Taoist understanding of the 'souffle' which is 'à la fois matière et esprit'.[120] Such an understanding, which is manifest in Oriental arts such as calligraphy, is assimilated by modern choreographers such as Carolyn Carlson, whose calligraphies (for instance figure 42) show an ambiguous shape of a body with all the potentials for change and mobility in its integral 'entrelac' with the forces of the world.

Figure 42

Calligraphy by Carolyn Carlson.[121]

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[119] Marion Schmid, 'Proust's Choreographies of Writing: *"À la recherche du temps perdu"* and the Modern Dance Revolution', *Marcel Proust Aujourd'hui*, 12 (2015), 91-108.

[120] François Cheng, *Cinq méditations sur la beauté* (Paris: Albin Michel, 2006), p. 95.

[121] Carolyn Carlson, and Jean-Pierre Siméon, *Traces d'encre* (Arles: Actes Sud, 2013), p. 55.

In *Jean Santeuil*, Proust dedicates an extraordinarily large proportion of the sea storm depiction to the experience of the protagonist before he actually faces the turbulence of the sea, namely the preparation for the voyage, the comments and advice from others, and especially the vivid description of the sights and sounds on the road. Such a structural arrangement conveys a message that the overwhelming power of the sea storm is best perceived in the 'not-yet' state as compared to the rather brief depiction of the direct experience, with the ingeniously conceived personifications of the foams as 'fuyards' or 'officiers' of the great battle ahead as previously quoted.[122] Such a preference for the becoming in Proust, closely associated with his concept on artistic creation, also correlates with one of the principle credos developed in the *Recherche*, notably iterated in the metaphor of the unfinished cathedrals that he utilises to describe the status of the protagonist's writing project.[123]

Such an aesthetic is also evident in Monet, especially in the works around 1890 characterised by mark-making and atmospheric brush strokes as Lewison suggests, which Monet insisted on keeping in the process of painting instead of offering them to the merchants, for '"finish[ing]" them would destroy them'.[124] Likewise, Turner's unfinished oils and watercolours of the sea, perpetually present an

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[122] *JS*, p. 374.

[123] *RTP*, IV (1989), p. 610.

[124] Quoted by Lewison, *Turner Monet Twombly*, p. 35.

emergent state, which, interestingly, continues due to the Thames flood of 1928 during which they were damaged, further exaggerating their indistinctness.[125]

Figure 43

Cy Twombly, *Unititled*, 2008, acrylic on canvas, 265.4 X 144.8 cm, private collection.

[125] Riding, *Turner & the Sea*, p. 236.

Figure 44

Joan Eardley, *Salmon Nets and the Sea*, 1960, oil on board, 120 x 220 cm, The Hunterian Museum and Art Gallery, University of Glasgow.

Figure 45

Joan Eardley, *Salmon Nets and the Sea* (detail), 1960, oil on board, 120 x 220 cm, The Hunterian Museum and Art Gallery, University of Glasgow.

Proust's emphasis on the artistic creative process that is open to change converges with the aesthetic tendency that values the visual traces that reveal the process and the gestures of the artist, which is constituted and continues to be carried out by the viewer, for example in the works of Cy Twombly that resemble the rhythm of the sea (figure 43) which convey the thickness of time itself through the visible trace-making gestures of the artist. It also brings to mind those seascapes of Joan Eardley (figures 44 and 45), which, along the path of Turner and Monet, invigorate the vision with broad and rough brushstrokes pregnant with the speed of the sea in an unfinished and everlasting movement. Such an aesthetic continuity from Proust could be summarised well in Cy Twombly's comment on the notion of process:

> In painting it is the forming of the image, the compulsive action of becoming, never static and always evolving, the direct and indirect pressures brought to a climax in the acute act of forming.[126]

3.3 Grand movement in the course of time

3.3.1 The work of memory

With movement considered from a larger perspective of time, the perception of water and air in Proust closely interrogates the domain of memory. The protagonist in *Jean Santeuil*, standing in front of Lake Geneva which, as previously analysed, resembles the quiet water scene painted by Whistler, struggles to grasp the aesthetic of an experience ambiguously associated with time and memory:

> Le regard que retiennent de tels spectacles en cherche la beauté, la raison supérieure de leur charme. Mais l'esprit a beau chercher, l'œil a beau s'ouvrir,

[126] Quoted by Jeremy Lewison, *Turner Monet Twombly*, p. 32.

> il semble que ce ne soit pas eux qui peuvent recevoir la jouissance esthétique. Est-ce même la mémoire? Non. (*JS*, p. 397)

As the protagonist investigates his own perception of beauty, he is led to a perplexed state where the designation of the aesthetic experience to a clear and solid cause becomes difficult: neither the spirit, nor the eye, or a certain memory explains such an experience. A further discussion on this perplexity reveals a predilection towards a bodily memory similar to the previously mentioned experience in Chapter 2. The vision of the lake, as the protagonist endeavours to delineate, is

> l'image d'une vie longtemps vécue et dont la beauté et le charme [retentissent] trop vivement dans mon cœur pour que j'aie besoin de chercher en quoi elle consiste. (*JS*, p. 399)

On the one hand, the vision of the lake evokes a memory which is 'longtemps vécue', so remote that it loses the reference in time and approximates to a primordial sense; on the other hand, the experience is of such an intensity that it is considered permanently alive.[127] In Merleau-Ponty's terms, the memory embedded in the body without chronological marks and lived by the body through echoing with all the sensory elements in the world illustrates such a complexity of time in the perception of a seemingly familiar yet undefinable beauty.

The charm of Impressionist paintings that is assimilated in Proust as Davide Vago suggests, resides in a similar perception of memory and time, since the impression in question is attributed not to the one 'du présent saisie au moment où

[127] *JS*, p. 399.

elle naît, mais plutôt 'l'impression gravée dans son cœur par la mémoire', the vividness of which paradoxically renders it timeless.[128]

The working of an artist's vision traversing time is not only manifest in Turner who, as Michael Bockemühl suggests, is interested in recalling an experience, but also in Whistler who relies on memory to realise a work in the studio, emulating the manner of the Chinese landscape painters that drop away specific details to retain the poetics of water scenes.[129]

The movement of an image in time, thanks to the transformative power of memory as revealed in Proust and the Impressionists as well as the closely related painters, constitutes a vision that transcends chronological confinements and, as Proust's protagonist confesses, demonstrates a memory that is perpetually living:

> [T]out d'un coup voici quelque réalité dégagée de ma vie, vue passer jadis comme des tableaux, gardée dans la mémoire comme des tableaux, et, au lieu de la tristesse de quelqu'un qui n'a que des collections, je me sens vivre, avoir vécu, ou plutôt avoir vécu quelque chose qui vit encore et qu'on pourra vivre demain. (*JS*, p. 400)

Such an openness and an unlimited view of time recognises a life in the memory of a certain space, which also coincides with Monet's belief that in order to paint the sea it must be regarded as a living creature always subject to change:

> [J]e sais bien que pour peindre la mer, il faut la voir tous les jours, à toute heure et au même endroit pour en connaître la vie à cet endroit-là.[130]

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[128] Vago, *Proust en couleur*, p. 33.

[129] Michael Bockemühl and J.M.W. Turner, *J.M.W. Turner, 1775-1851: The World of Light and Colour* (Köln: Taschen 2015), p. 72.

[130] Quoted by Thomson, 'Normandy in the 1880s', in *Claude Monet: 1840 – 1926*, p. 206.

3.3.2 Movement in nature's time

What Proust's protagonist exalts in regarding his experience with the tempest and calmness of the sea, resides in the capability of the latter to evoke a vision without much trace of human activity, as the wind that brings back the memory of the tempest in Beg-Meil to Jean who

> écoutait le vent, s'exaltant de sa force, et enchanté de sa douceur si poétique en effet, car elle est toute pure d'éléments étrangers, elle semble sans cause, elle ne peut faire penser à rien d'humain, à aucune action. (*JS*, p. 532)

The preference for the absence of human traces in the natural force of the sea is reiterated several times in Proust's early writings. For instance, the short essay on the sea in *Les Plaisirs et les jours* underlines such an advantage of the sea for those who

> ont besoin de repos avant d'avoir éprouvé encore aucune fatigue, la mer les consolera, les exaltera vaguement. Elle ne porte pas comme la terre les traces des travaux des hommes et de la vie humaine. (*JS*, p. 143)

Such a singularity of the sea approximates to the art of music which, as Proust observes, 'ne porte pas comme le langage la trace des choses', 'ne nous dit rien des hommes',[131] and thus creates an almost primordial state of mind where the viewer 'confond sa destinée et celle des choses'.[132] Proust's predilection for the lack of specific details of human life in the water, as previously analysed, coincides with the portrayal of the Thames by Whistler, who constantly compares his composition of

[131] *JS*, p. 143.

[132] Ibid., p. 144.

the *Nocturnes* to the idea of music that arranges the elements of nature without conveying any anecdotal interest.

The musicality of the water, to a certain extent, mirrors another desire inspired by the sea in the protagonist of *Jean Santeuil*, namely the wish to approach the life of animals, which is vividly expressed through an enumeration of the purity of their activity and movement within a vaster timescale:

> Nous envions le boa pour qui digérer est l'occupation d'une semaine et qui peut alors dormir plusieurs jours de suite. Nous envions le lézard qui reste des journées sur une pierre chaude à se laisser pénétrer de soleil. Nous envions la baleine qui fait de beaux voyages dans le Pacifique, les phoques qui jouent dans la mer au soleil, les mouettes qui jouent dans les orages et se laissent porter par le vent. Car le sommeil, la nourriture, la mer, le vent, nous les aimons avec notre imagination pour tout ce qu'ils représentent de force et de douceur pour nous. Et ce n'est que dans la vie des animaux que nous pouvons les envisager tout purs, remplissant la vie tout entière. (*JS*, p. 144)

Nature as seen in the pure elements that permeate the life of the animals, free from the contamination of human thoughts, similar to the previous quotation that foregrounds the movements of the tempest as 'sans cause',[133] remains perpetually tempting for the protagonist who longs for a bodily engagement:

> Jean essayait, sans le pouvoir, d'approfondir pour en garder quelque chose, et que son corps aussi essayait d'approfondir. (*JS*, p. 532)

But such an engagement is always hindered by the limitations of being human. Proust describes the hours spent at the shore when

> [n]ous nous penchons vers les choses avec avidité comme si elles pouvaient nous donner, la mer sa force inépuisable, le vent son souffle, l'air de mer sa pureté. Illusion qui enchaîne tant de malades dans les lieux sauvages où la nature est pleine de force, tant de penseurs épuisés là où il n'y a que des forces sans pensée, la mer aveugle, le vent sourd, les animaux qui ne pensent à rien, le boa qui digère pendant dix jours, la marmotte qui dort un hiver, la

[133] Ibid., p. 532.

> baleine qui vit trois cents ans, la mouette qui vole un mois sans se fatiguer et en dix jours va au Pacifique, au milieu desquels être inaltérablement calmes, ou desquelles forces éternellement vivantes la mort ou la folie qui les guettait les prend. Nous avons beau nous pencher au-dessus du réservoir de toutes les forces: il n'entre jamais qu'autant d'air qu'en laisse passer notre haleine, et il ne vient jamais dans notre sang qu'aussi impur que l'ont fait nos poumons. (*JS*, p. 369)

The desire that draws the protagonist towards animals and the sea, to '[se] pench[er] vers les choses', shown in the contrast of the way of being between nature and human, expresses at the same time the difficulty in a Cartesian conception of the body and mind relationship and a Merleau-Pontian tendency to resolve the problem through the primoridality of the body. Such a tendency is realised in the intention to approximate to the life of animals, namely, to live in a holistic perception of the world where time and space are considered in great expansion.[134] Proust accentuates a nearly cosmic view of movement and time when the protagonist contemplates the physiognomy of the sea as previously quoted by pointing out that the places

> garderont après notre mort pour quelque temps encore (car les lieux changent moins vite que les hommes) pour des yeux qui n'y verront plus […] [leur] rideau de saules, ou [leur] chemin montant, ou [le] remous de [leur] eau sous le pont entre les nénuphars. (*JS*, p. 535)

Such a perception of movement through a transcendence of the dimension of human experience, reveals an understanding of time that borders on the Einsteinian

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[134] The celebration of the quasi primordial limitless of animalistic perspective coincides with the image proposed by Zhuangzi, one of the founders of Taoism, whose well-known description of the huge animal summarises the gist of the Taoist ideal state of being, 'there was a fish in the North Ocean, called the Kun, which was so big that it was hard to know how many miles it was'. (*Free and Easy Wandering*)(北冥有魚，其名為鯤。鯤之大，不知其幾千里也。《逍遙遊》)

picture of space-time, which undergoes more full manifestation towards the end of the *Recherche* where the vision of human figures is projected into a quasi four-dimensional landscape, with time rendered visible as a continuous spatial structure, turning people into 'des géants plongés dans les années'.[135]

The transcendence revealed in the consideration of movement under the greater term of time, also explains Proust's appreciation of Whistler, whose *Nocturnes* convey at the same time a stillness and a movement over a long period of time that produces a blurred vision of change and flux.[136] In this series, the boats on the Thames, similar to the description of boats on a quiet water surface in *Jean Santeuil* as previously quoted, convey an intertwined relationship between humans and the rest of the world. Such a connection is not manifest in the involvement of specific social affairs as previously mentioned, but in the resonance between humans as part of the universe and nature as perceived by human. For instance, in *Jean Santeuil*, the pattern of marks on the water resembles the general image of human memory in the protagonist's eye, as Proust describes, 'ce tableau de toute eau […] comme si la vie humaine avait appris la géographie à la nature qui l'inscrit maintenant, s'est assez approprié ces souvenirs humains en notation de nuances et de lumières'.[137]

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[135] *RTP*, IV (1989), p. 625.

[136] Spalding, *Whistler*, p. 86.

[137] *JS*, p. 398.

Conclusion

The depictions of water and air in the works of Turner, Monet, and Whistler, three closely associated artists who distinguish themselves from other seascape painters of the era through their engaging sensitivity, encounter a remarkable resonance in the early writings of Proust. Proust's descriptions of rivers, lakes, the sea, and the atmosphere not only convey a painterly awareness of the creative and viewing process that attends to the physicality of painting, such as frame, texture of paint, particular brushstroke gestures, and synesthestic experience, but also converge with the three artists in a vision of water and air that differs from an artistic tradition that treats seascapes and riverscapes merely as a genre and the water merely as a backdrop. Their commonality resides firstly in their sincere and dedicated gaze of the water and air which seeks beauty in themselves as they are, and recognises their richness and power with an open attitude that surrenders the body to an immersive experience. Through abandoning distinctness and detail in the depiction of colour, space and movement, they propose a vision that approximates the aesthetic of music, foregrounding a tendency towards abstraction that would be fully borne out in twentieth-century artists such as Cy Twombly, Zao Wouki, and Mark Rothko, while still acknowledging the concreteness of visual depiction, which endows their common vision with an extraordinary and alluring ambiguity. Proust's early writings on the sky, the seascapes and the river scenes in *Jean Santeuil* and other short essays demonstrate a multi-faceted vision that sometimes resonates with one of these artists, sometimes witnesses a convergence of several of them, including a variety of

perception that covers the stylistic alteration during Turner's creative career. Merleau-Ponty's conception of the primordial impression, the bodily engagement of the viewer, and the movement embedded in the visual arts offers an excellent template for understanding the aesthetic intersection between Proust and the three artists in the context of water and air depiction. Their resonance also foregrounds the ontological significance of the visual arts and the hint of spirituality that opens dialogues with Oriental philosophies.

Chapter 4

The Young Proust and Portrait Painting:

Rembrandt, Van Dyck, and Jacques-Émile Blanche

Compared with the intensity of his enthusiasm for and attentiveness towards genre scenes, plants, the water, and airy atmosphere, the young Proust's writing attempt at the portrayal of human figures is relatively brief, but nevertheless rich in its diversity. Apart from prefiguring the supreme 'word portraits' in the *Recherche*, the emerging interest in the depiction of people in the young Proust strongly resonates with his interest in painters of human figures, notably Rembrandt, Anthony van Dyck, Jacques-Émile Blanche, and Gustave Moreau. Interestingly, all these artists lose their dominant roles in the *Recherche*. Rembrandt is merely implicitly referenced, and Van Dyck is only mentioned once in *Albertine disparue*. Blanche, similarly, remains one of the 'simples portraitistes de la société mondaine',[1] and Moreau gradually disappears in the aesthetic transition from Symbolism toward Impressionism between *Jean Santeuil* and the *Recherche*.[2] By contrast, in the early works the particularity of Proust's vision on human portraiture and identity is closely revealed in his appreciation of these artists.

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[1] Yoshikawa, *Proust et l'art pictural*, p. 221.

[2] Yae-Jin Yoo, 'Marcel Proust et Gustave Moreau: Du symbolisme à l'impressionisme', *Romance Notes*, 54-2 (2014), 211-219.

In his twenties, for the questionnaire 'Marcel Proust par lui-même', Proust put the name of Rembrandt next to Leonardo da Vinci as his favourite painters.[3] His frequent visits to the Louvre and a possible visit to the Rembrandt exhibition in Amsterdam were followed by two articles, 'Chardin et Rembrandt' and 'Rembrandt' (as mentioned in Chapter 1).[4] In these two articles, written around 1895 and 1900 respectively, Proust underlines the humble presence of the depicted figures in Rembrandt's works and the quality of thought conveyed through the master's late style. Rembrandt's predilection for the depiction of old people also resonates with the author's particular interest in the aged is manifest in *Jean Santeuil*. The passion for Rembrandt is explicitly addressed in *Jean Santeuil*:

> Oui, il y a des moments où la pensée des Rembrandt, le désir de Rembrandt nous envahit. Nous avons faim de cette obscurité, nous voudrions voir cette lueur, nous nous représentons ces chairs dorées. (*JS*, p. 570)

Another portrait painter that particularly attracted the young Proust during his visits to the Louvre at the beginning of 1890s was Anthony van Dyck.[5] The narrator expresses his deep fascination with this painter of royal elegance in *Jean Santeuil* (cited in Chapter 2):

> Il y a des moments de la vie où devant un tableau de Van Dyck, nous sentons qu'il n'y a rien de plus délicieux à aimer. (*JS*, p. 472)

Van Dyck is referenced several times in Proust's early writings, including in Jean's explicit intention to visit the Louvre to contemplate the *Portrait of James Stuart,*

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[3] *CSB*, p. 337.

[4] Helen Borowitz, 'The Rembrandt and Monet of Marcel Proust', *The Bulletin of the Cleveland Museum of Art*, 70-2 (1983), 73-95 (p. 73).

[5] Vallès-Bled, *Proust et les peintres*, p. 192.

Duke of Lennox and Richmond and the *Portrait of the Three Eldest Children of Charles I* in *Jean Santeuil*, as well as a poem dedicated to the artist in 'Portraits de peintres' in *Les Plaisirs et les jours*.[6] Also, in his ekphrastic essay 'La Personne d'Alphonse Daudet: œuvre d'art', by referencing the nobility of King Charles in Van Dyck's *Charles I at the Hunt*, Proust reveals his appreciation of Van Dyck's aesthetics in portraiture that he intends to emulate in his own depiction of the human figure.[7]

Jacques-Émile Blanche had been Proust's lifelong friend since their childhood.[8] The painter produced the iconic portrait of the young Proust which was proudly adored by the latter.[9] Their abundant correspondence and collaborations evidence a profound mutual appreciation.[10] Dedicating a chapter to Proust in his *Mes Modèles*, Blanche presents a perception of identity also shared by Proust, who, in his juvenilia - including articles on exhibitions of paintings published in *Le Mensuel* and an ekphrasis of his own portrait in *Jean Santeuil* - expresses a complex state of self-perception.[11]

Nathalie Aubert identifies 'deux versants des préoccupations proustiennes', one extracting the 'essence' of life in its recreation, the other seeking to 'préserver la chair de la phénoménalité'.[12] In the domain of portrait painting, which closely

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[6] *JS*, pp. 727-28.

[7] *CSB*, pp. 399-402.

[8] Jane Roberts, *Jacques-Émile Blanche* (Paris: Gourcuff Gradenigo, 2012), p. 78.

[9] Ibid.

[10] Yoshikawa, *Proust et l'art pictural*, p. 219.

[11] Jacques-Émile Blanche, *Mes modèles: Souvenirs littéraires: Barrès, Hardy, Proust, James, Gide, Moore* (Paris: Stock, 1984).

[12] Aubert, *Proust: La Traduction du sensible*, p. 1.

interrogates the duality of the body, the appreciation of the beauty of an individual, and the question of what constitutes an identity, the young Proust demonstrates a concern that puts various forces into debate with each other, recognising a tension between the 'platonisante' intention and the purely physical approach in the perception of the human.[13] His approach can be likened to the Merleau-Pontian effort to reconcile the opposition between Empiricism and Intellectualism through the idea of the phenomenal body situated in-between the conscious and the objective. From the quasi-spiritual reading of Rembrandt, to the appreciation of the ambiguous quality of nobility in Van Dyck, not forgetting the multiplicity of identities Proust adopts in his appreciation of and interchange with Blanche, nor his analytical awareness of the practice of Gustave Moreau, in his early writings the young Proust already presents an evaluation of the 'deux versants' identified by Aubert.[14]

This chapter will first look into Proust's engagement with Rembrandt, focusing on their common predilection for the portraiture of thinkers and old people, analysed in comparison with artists such as Titian and Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio. By doing so, we aim to identify Proust and Rembrandt's shared preoccupation with phenomenological aspects including gesture, breath, and gaze. With a Merleau-Pontian explanation of the in-between ambiguity of the body, the second part will investigate Proust's fascination with Van Dyck, endeavouring to define the quality of elegance in the human figures portrayed by the artist that so

[13] Ibid.

[14] Ibid.

intrigued Proust. Finally, the young Proust's perception of himself in relation to his understanding of the depiction of human figures in painting will be discussed in relation to Blanche, with a particular focus on the multiplicity of identities, namely a co-existence of different and even opposing identities as regards age, gender, artistic profession, and social persona.

I Early pursuit of spirituality: contemplating and 'painting' Rembrandt

1.1 Painting age

The intellectual power in Rembrandt's works depicted by the young Proust, culminates in an envisioned dialogue with an aged thinker, Ruskin, who pays a visit to the exhibition of the Dutch master, in the essay 'Rembrandt'.[15] Proust focuses his admiring and sympathetic gaze upon the figure of the old Ruskin, the fragility of which echoes many portraits of old people by Rembrandt. Even more significantly, the spirituality of the master's creation celebrated in this imagined episode, encounters an equally divine character in Proust's eye, whose name 'entré déjà dans l'immortalité, semblait sortir de la mort'.[16] The vicinity of death meditated in this scene reiterates one of the fundamental reasons behind Proust's predilection for old age in his early years, as asserted in the leading paragraph of 'Le Sommeil d'un vieillard' in *Jean Santeuil*:

> Tous les hommes meurent, c'est par là que le plus grand est petit, dit la

[15] *CSB*, p. 659-64.

[16] Ibid., p. 663.

> philosophie commune. Je dirai: c'est par là que le plus petit est grand, puisque c'est par là qu'il touche à l'infini et au néant. Par la pensée de la mort ou à la venue de la mort, dans l'âme la plus obscure ou la plus bornée s'ouvre un jour mystérieux sur l'infini. (*JS*, p. 878)

Figure 1

Rembrandt, *Simeon with the Christ Child in the Temple*, 1669, canvas, 99 × 80 cm, Nationalmuseum, Stockholm.

Emerging from the image of an old man close to death, the gripping and unfathomable notion of infinity coincides with the equally mysterious dark shadow in the chiaroscuro of Rembrandt. Similarly, in his late years, Rembrandt frequently returned to the depiction of Simeon (for instance in *Simeon with the Christ Child in the Temple* (figure 1)), a subject preferred to all the other popular themes in the Old Testament, such as the annunciation and the massacre of the innocents. Moreover, Rembrandt even left an unfinished tableau of the scene on the easel when he passed

away.[17] According to a poem by Heyblocq, after seeing the infant Christ, the pious Simeon 'wishes now to die'.[18] In Rembrandt's depiction of an old figure, the faith of entering into eternity that conquers the fear of death, transcends the religious context and resonates with Proust's philosophical meditation through a common intensive attention to the materiality of old age. The dialogue transpires a universal inclination towards eternity in Rembrandt and imbues for Proust an almost religious elevation into the contemplation of time.

The proximity of the aged to infinity marked by the temporal closeness to death in Proust, however, does not limit itself as an abstract position in the timeline. Artistic creation, according to Stefan Kristensen, manifests a Merleau-Pontian notion of time and space where 'l'instant est étendu et non pas ponctuel'.[19] As analysed in Chapter 1, the Rembrandtesque genre scenes in Proust radiate a Merleau-Pontian sense of time ('je suis moi-même le temps').[20] And, as Merleau-Ponty suggests, instead of passively accepting the passing of time, it is the body that 'fait le temps au lieu de le subir'.[21]

Similarly, in Proust's portrayal of old figures, the working of time is incarnated into a certain present where the aging process is attributed with extraordinary

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[17] Gary Schwartz, and Rembrandt Harmenszoon van Rijn, *Rembrandt's Universe: His Art, His Life, His World* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2006), p. 366.

[18] Ibid., p. 362.

[19] Stefan Kristensen, 'L'Innocence de l'artiste', in *L'Œil et l'esprit: Maurice Merleau-Ponty entre art et philosophie*, ed. by Lorenzo Vinciguerra and Fabrice Bourlez (Reims: Épure, 2015).

[20] *PP*, p. 481.

[21] Ibid., p. 277.

prudence, comparable to the masterful treatment of age in Rembrandt. Not only does the way Proust describes the visit of Jean to his philosophy mentor M. Beulier every year, who is found to be 'un peu vieilli',[22] parallel the grand range of Rembrandt's self-portraits that record the process of aging almost by year, a Rembrandtesque slowing effect of time for old people in their intensive absorption of the present is also foregrounded by Proust through 'une impossibilité matérielle', which, 'dans les quelques dernières années ou semaines qui restent à vivre, paraissent encore importantes et réelles'.[23]

As Marcel Brion points out, what Rembrandt produces in his works, contrary to the typical 'temps parfait' of Holbein, is a sense of 'temps imparfait' which reveals an 'être en train de se faire', rooted in the visible brushstrokes of light and the figure slowly emerging out of darkness. Thus is an essentially Bergsonian character fully absorbed in Proust's idea of the 'moi' 'au fond de nous-même' in his early writings,[24] and further extended into the *Recherche* as one of the core themes of his aesthetics.[25] In this sense, another layer of eternity that adds to the temporal proximity renders the 'brun' in Rembrandt 'primordial' and 'atemporel'.[26] As Merleau-Ponty indicates, 'le temps dans l'expérience primordiale' is not a 'système

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[22] *JS*, p. 270.

[23] *CSB*, p. 662.

[24] Ibid., pp. 221-22. In 'La Méthode de Sainte-Beuve', Proust proposes the notion of 'un autre moi' that centres upon an author's deeper sense of identity different from his everyday habits and social life. This notion will be illustrated in the second part of the chapter.

[25] Marcel Brion, Maurice Blondel, and L. Cochet, 'Séance du samedi 6 novembre 1937. La Notion du temps chez Rembrandt', *Les Études philosophiques*, 14 (1940), 18-19.

[26] Ibid.

de positions objectives' but 'un milieu mouvant'.[27] The absorption into such a subtly moving moment, similar to the poetics of indistinctness analysed in the previous chapter, refers to an unspecific 'passé originel'.[28] That explains the way the attentive gazes towards old people in *Jean Santeuil* and the detailed depiction of the slowly moving figure of the aged Ruskin in 'Rembrandt', like the visage and body of the old father integrated into the moment in *The Return of the Prodigal Son* (figure 2), as Horst Woldemar Janson suggests, quietly stretch into eternity.[29]

Figure 2

Rembrandt, *The Return of the Prodigal Son*, 1663-1669, canvas, 262 × 205 cm, Hermitage Museum, Saint Petersburg.

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[27] *PP*, p. 480.

[28] Ibid., p. 280.

[29] Horst Woldemar Janson and Anthony F. Janson, *History of Art: The Western Tradition* (Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Pearson/Prentice-Hall, 2004), p. 598.

Figure 3

Rembrandt, *Portrait of Jan Six*, 1654, canvas, 112 x 102 cm, Six Collection, Amsterdam.

Rembrandt's predilection for the portrayal of the aged often goes in harmony with an enthusiasm for portraits of poets and thinkers. As Irene Linnik observes, the special Rembrandt theme that can be generalised as 'old people' or 'ancestors' is based on a common charm derived not from the sitters' 'noble origin, wealth or business acumen', but most significantly from 'their wisdom and experience'.[30] Hence Rembrandt's *Portrait of Jan Six* (figure 3), as Brown comments, renders the poet 'aged beyond his years', enhancing the intellectual aura embedded in old age.[31] Similarly, in *Jean Santeuil*, the physiognomy of the philosophy teacher M. Beulier, evokes the protagonist's tender feelings towards his mentor that resemble the love for his aged mother:

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[30] Vladimir Levinson-Lessing, et al, ed., *Rembrandt Harmensz van Rijn: Paintings from Soviet Museums* (Leningrad: Aurora, 1987), p. 19.

[31] Brown, *Rembrandt, a Study of His Life and Work* (London: Duckworth and Co., 1907), p. 320.

> Il n'était ni beau ni laid, mais Jean regardait ses joues rouges, son nez fort, ses mains gonflées de veines avec un respect si tendre que, si la froideur de M. Beulier ne l'en eût éloigné, il les eût embrassés avec des précautions infinies comme les joues, le nez, les mains de sa mère. (*JS*, pp. 269-70)

A close correlation between the thinker and the aged is realised under the tender gaze of Proust through the eye of the protagonist Jean that almost caresses and kisses their cheeks, nose and 'ses mains gonflées de veines', the latter of which Rembrandt constantly treats in his portraits of the seniors with extraordinary effort and care.[32] For instance, in *Portrait of Baertje Martens* (figure 4), the veins under the rough skin of the two superposed hands are touchingly lifelike. The meditative and tender presence of the figure in this portrait resonates with the equally

Figure 4

Rembrandt, *Portrait of Baertje Martens*, 1640, oil on oak panel, 75.1 x 55.9 cm, Hermitage Museum, Saint Petersburg.

[32] *JS*, p. 269.

Figure 5

Rembrandt, *Portrait of the Poet Jeremias de Decker*, 1666, oil on panel, 71 x 56 cm, Hermitage Museum, Saint Petersburg.

compassionate look of the sitter in *Portrait of the Poet Jeremias de Decker* (figure 5), who, portrayed near the end of his life, transfers all the previous bitterness and misfortunes into a tender-hearted gaze.[33]

In *Jean Santeuil*, Proust places great attention upon the caring look of the senior figures towards their children, constantly describing it with a philosophical concern:

> [U]n père ou une mère qui avait une grande ambition pour ses enfants et n'a plus pour eux qu'une immense tendresse, a-t-il dans les yeux, dans le geste, dans l'expression, quelque chose d'entièrement détaché de soi — ce quelque

[33] As Linnik points out, the poet lost most of his family at a young age, which accounts for a grave nature of his personality. *Rembrandt Harmensz van Rijn: Paintings from Soviet Museums*, ed. by Levinson-Lessing and others, p. 29.

> chose de purement bon qui flotte dans les yeux comme une fleur d'eau, comme s'il n'avait pas de racine dans le corps — et quelque chose d'infini qui se donne et sent qu'il ne pourra pas se donner longtemps. (*JS*, p. 246)

In depicting the demeanour of the parents, Proust accentuates the existence of tenderness as something 'entièrement détaché de soi', and thus designates a rootless spirituality in his word portraits.[34] There is also a tendency to highlight a transcendental understanding of human beings, which might hardly be disassociable from the young Proust's fascination with the spiritual quality in Rembrandt's works of his 'troisième manière' towards which he expresses an unreserved admiration in 'Rembrandt'.[35] Such a tendency, with a hint of Cartesian dualism, is also evident in the sorrowful portrait of M. Santeuil, who

> contempl[e] sa fille avec amour et avec tristesse, moins par triste retour sur soi dans la pensée qu'on ne la verra plus bientôt, que par cette tristesse qu'a forcément celui qui aime uniquement un être pour lui et qui, sentant alors l'essence même de sa vie, en sent forcément la tristesse. (*JS*, p. 246)

The spiritual insight of old people that penetrates the being of another person and reaches the 'essence même de sa vie',[36] reveals a serious contemplation of the dynamics between life and art, material and spirit. The same intention leads Proust to differentiate the social self and the profound self in *Contre Sainte-Beuve*,[37] and to

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[34] *JS*, p. 246.

[35] Just as Ruskin did for the watercolours of Turner, Proust maps out the three stages in the development of style in Rembrandt: at first, 'les oeuvres d'un homme peuvent ressembler plus à la nature qu'à lui-même'; at a second stage, the essence of the artist excited by the contact with nature 'imprègne' the works more completely; and the third stage is marked by the immersion of the painted objects in 'une sorte de matière dorée'. *CSB*, pp. 660-1.

[36] Ibid.

[37] Ibid., pp. 221-22.

point out the radical difference between two understandings of Ruskin in the previously mentioned episode of homage: 'c'était lui, Ruskin, deux choses si différentes, ce vieillard inconnu et tâtonnant et l'idée que nous nous faisions de Ruskin'.[38]

As is shown, Proust's insistence on the freedom of the incorporeal side of a person occupies a significant part of his early writings, culminating in the portrayal of the character M. Beulier, whose body

> pouvait bien s'user comme une vieille robe de chambre, mais cela ne faisait pas partie de lui. Et si son âme ne pouvait pas secouer loin d'elle ce corps, au moins, comme une eau souterraine mais voisine, dans toute la fraîcheur active de la personne elle trahissait sa présence, jusqu'[à ce que] dans le bassin miroitant, fluide, sans cesse accru des yeux souriants, elle vînt déborder. (*JS*, p. 270)

Proust recognises the freshness of the 'âme' of M. Beulier despite the ruin of his fragile body. Showing a much deeper appreciation than the freshness in spirit of young people, Proust reveals a complex paradox in the seemingly detached dualistic opposition of body and spirit. The beauty of the 'âme' of the aged consists precisely in the battling perceptions as seen in the previously mentioned Ruskin episode, which also explains why Proust deems the voice of an aged actress in a theatre the most ineffable thing:

> Et les seules choses ineffables que nous ayons entendues au théâtre, c'est par une actrice vieille, quand le corps est déjà fragile et que la bouche, les regards, la mémoire trahissent la personne qui leur pardonne, mais aussi où l'âme peut jouer librement dans les ruines du corps. (*JS*, p. 246)

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[38] Ibid., p. 663.

Such a perception of the paradoxical phenomenon of souls which is uncontaminated by old age but whose beauty nevertheless relies on the physical presence of the aged body, is recognised by Proust in a manner akin to the perception of painterly quality, as he refers to the beauty of the Titian portraits when commenting on M. Beulier's spiritual essence:

> Cette essence d'âme, toute la personne de M. Beulier en était comme enduite, comme certains personnages du Titien sont comme enveloppés d'une beauté qui est la beauté de la peinture, et aussi de la vie, et qui nous donne tant de joie à les regarder. (*JS*, p. 269)

1.2 Thinking portraits

In the paragraph quoted above, the medium of painting is attributed with a particular duality which addresses precisely not the detachment, but the ambiguous homogeneity between material and thoughts. Commenting on the Merleau-Pontian aesthetics, Véronique M. Fóti points out, 'painting subverts the classical philosophical oppositions between consciousness and materiality, action and passion, subject and object, or self and other'.[39]

Such a philosophical concern on the idea of portrait painting is persistent in Proust. Indeed, in the opening paragraph of 'Rembrandt', one finds a counter-part to his comment on the essence of M. Beulier with a reference to Titian:

> Les musées sont des maisons qui abritent seulement des pensées. Ceux qui sont le moins capables de pénétrer ces pensées savent que ce sont des pensées qu'ils regardent dans ces tableaux placés les uns après les autres, que

[39] Véronique M. Fóti, 'The Evidences of Painting: Merleau-Ponty and Contemporary Abstraction', in *Merleau-Ponty: Difference, Materiality, Painting*, ed. by Véronique M. Fóti (Amherst, N.Y.: Humanity Books, 2000), p. 141.

> ces tableaux sont précieux, et que la toile, les couleurs qui s'y sont séchées et le bois doré lui-même qui l'encadre ne le sont pas. (*CSB*, p. 659)

The almost immoderate foregrounding of thoughts against the aesthetic value of the physical presence of the painting estimates Rembrandt as the epitome of spirituality, equally represented in the character M. Beulier, whose 'grande intelligence' has firmly established his spiritualist doctrines in the protagonist's mind.[40]

Figure 6

Rembrandt, *Homer*, 1663, canvas, 82 x 107 cm, Mauritshuis, Hague.

[40] *JS*, p. 479.

Figure 7

Rembrandt, *Aristotle with a Bust of Homer*, 1653, canvas, 143.5 x 136.5 cm, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

Interestingly, the disparity between Proust's references to Titian and to Rembrandt aptly corresponds to the differences between the two masters in style and manner. As Charles John Holmes suggests, compared with Titian's colourist rendering of paint that creates an alluring visual appeal that inspires painters, Rembrandt 'appeals to our sympathies and intellect rather than to our aesthetic sense pure and simple' in his chiaroscurist portraits with which 'man of intellect

sympathy almost as readily as the artists'.[41] Indeed, as a solitary artist whom, as Fromentin comments, '[n]ulle affaire publique [...] tire hors de son atelier et le laisse entrer dans la politique de son temps, nulles grandes faveurs [...] jamais l'aient rattaché à aucun prince',[42] Rembrandt, endowed with the innocence of the artist to 'échapper toute responsabilité politique',[43] to use Stefan Kristensen's terms, is on the contrary particularly active in the companionship between the painters and poets in Amsterdam in the 1650s.[44] An intimate friend of the poets Constatijin Huygens and Jan Six, and the foremost painter celebrated by the Amsterdam poets, Rembrandt produces a considerable number of '"thinking" portraits' that constitute a moral type in his œuvre, among them the portraits of his poet friends as previously mentioned, and also the renowned portrait of Homer (figure 6) and *Aristotle with a Bust of Homer* (figure 7).[45] Through depicting figures absorbed in meditation, Rembrandt reveals himself as a thinker that materialises thought through painting, in tune with the humanist ambience that closely associates the art of poetry with painting. Revealingly, a collection of contemporary poems praising Rembrandt cites in its dedication to him the ancient Greek writer Simonides: 'Poetry is a speaking painting, and painting a silent poetry'.[46]

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[41] Charles John Holmes and Rembrandt Harmenszoon van Rijn, *Notes on the Art of Rembrandt* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1911), p. 203.

[42] Eugène Fromentin, *Les Maîtres d'autrefois: Belgique, Hollande* (Paris: E. Plon, 1876), p. 395.

[43] Kristensen, 'L'Innocence de l'artiste', p. 15.

[44] Schwartz, *Rembrandt's Universe*, p. 216.

[45] Borowitz, 'The Rembrandt and Monet of Marcel Proust', p. 74.

[46] Ibid., p. 217.

The possibility of implicating poetic and philosophical interrogation into the painting practice, provides for a ground on which Proust describes the experience of perception in 'Rembrandt':

> comme une promenade dans un musée n'aura d'intérêt véritable pour un penseur que quand en aura tout d'un coup jailli une de ces idées qui aussitôt lui paraissaient riches et susceptibles d'en engendrer d'autres précieuses. (*CSB*, p. 660)

For Proust, the value of Rembrandt's art above all else resides in its capacity to engender thoughts, and therefore painting and the practice of painting facilitate a situation described by Merleau-Ponty as 'penser en peinture', which has much to do with Rembrandt's manner of portraiture that masters the intricate relationship between the visible and the invisible.[47] Engaging less with representing the actual appearance of sitters than does Titian, Rembrandt often employs a laconic style, for instance in the *Portrait of an Old Man in Red*. Irene Linnik points out the lack of detail in this work which enhances the portrait's grandiose monumentality.[48] Apart from the vision commented by Fromentin as decompositionalist and reductionist, the choice of palette and the manner of brushstroke with which both colour and contour undergo an interrogation of the hidden, the indistinct and the invisible, explain the magic of Rembrandt which, according to Fromentin, consists in 'dessiner sans bords, à colorer sans coloris, à concentrer la lumière du monde solaire en un rayon'.[49]

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[47] Nicoletta Salomon, 'Les Artistes savent-ils ce qu'ils font?', in *L'Œil et l'esprit: Maurice Merleau-Ponty entre art et philosophie*, p. 48.

[48] *Rembrandt Harmensz van Rijn: Paintings from Soviet Museums*, ed. by Vladimir Levinson-Lessing and others (Leningrad: Aurora, 1987), p. 18.

[49] Fromentin, *Les Maîtres d'autrefois*, p. 410.

Figure 8

Rembrandt, *Cornelis Claesz. Anslo (1592-1646), Amsterdam Mennonite preacher and cloth merchant, in conversation with his wife Aeltje Gerritsdr Schouten (1598-1657)*, 1641, canvas, 172 x 209 cm, Staatliche Museen, Berlin.

Also, the vision of Rembrandt that emphasises expression against the ideal notion of resemblance, already discernible in his early self-portraits that experimented with various exaggerated facial expressions, achieves an almost synesthetic effect in *Cornelis Claesz. Anslo (1592-1646), Amsterdam Mennonite preacher and cloth merchant, in conversation with his wife Aeltje Gerritsdr Schouten (1598-1657)* (figure 8), on which the poet Joost van den Vondel wrote the following eulogy:

> Ay, Rembrandt, paint Cornelisís voice
> The visible part is the least of him.
> The invisible one can know only through the ears
> He who wants to see Anslo has to hear him[50]

Rembrandt's brilliance to evoke Cornelis's voice, not only manifests his virtuosity in rendering a person's charm through masterfully depicting the manner of expression and gesture, but also reveals the inter-sensory connection underlined by Merleau-Ponty in considering the idea of the invisible. Interestingly, Merleau-Ponty alludes to the 'petite phrase de Swann' and its significance 'sans équivalent' in the *Recherche*, to fixate the idea of the invisible as something 'derrière les sons ou entre eux, derrière les lumières ou entre elles, reconnaissables à leur manière toujours spéciale, toujours unique'.[51]

The young Proust explicitly states in 'Chardin et Rembrandt' that the charm of Rembrandt lies in the ability to transcend reality:

> Avec Rembrandt la réalité même sera dépassée. Nous comprenons que la beauté n'est pas dans les objets, car sans doute alors elle ne serait si profonde et si mystérieuse. Nous verrons les objets n'être rien par eux-mêmes, orbites creux dont la lumière est l'expression changeante, le reflet prêté de la beauté, le regard divin. (*CSB*, p. 380)

The objects in Rembrandt, as Proust suggests, are nothing but a reflecting vehicle for the mysterious light, which is further explained in Proust's examination of Rembrandt's evolvement in style:

> Mais à partir d'un certain moment, toutes ces figures apparaissent dans une sorte de matière dorée, comme si elles avaient été toutes peintes dans un même jour qui serait, semble-t-il, celui du soleil couchant quand les rayons frappant directement les objets les dorent. (*CSB*, p. 660)

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[50] Schwartz, *Rembrandt's Universe*, p. 189.

[51] *VI*, p. 198.

The alternations of painting technique throughout Rembrandt's career are confirmed by scholars who closely examine the appearance and the physical components of the paintings. Comparing his earlier works with the paintings produced in later years, Brown points out the significant change in colour use from a cooler palette to a warmer range of hues with a suppression of local tints. In the second half of his career, which corresponds to Proust's reference of the 'troisième manière', Rembrandt's predilection for 'tawny umber tones, broken with greens and warmed by occasional touches of red' becomes all the more pronounced.[52] Apart from the warm hues associated with the effect of sunlight encountering darkness, Rembrandt masters the use of transparent pigments as the base material that creates a fluid ground that loads the light in a mysterious weightlessness in which almost everything becomes a 'ghost object'.[53]

What Proust appreciates in the manner of Rembrandt that renders objects and human figures in a 'perspective extrêmement profonde', however, does not necessarily correlate with the symbolic realm which Rembrandt nevertheless appeals to in his practice.[54] Therefore, while Proust lays much emphasis on the notion of 'pensées' in Rembrandt's paintings, Rembrandt's bond with the poets and philosophers is revealed in a very different way from sharing the specific devices and symbolic ideas of the latter. Fromentin also raises a doubt on the vision of a

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[52] Brown, Gerard Baldwin, *Rembrandt: A Study of His Life and Work*, p. 299.

[53] Ibid., p. 302.

[54] *CSB*, p. 661.

philosopher in the identity of Rembrandt, 'était-ce enfin un philosophe comme on entend le mot philosopher?'[55] Similarly, observing that actual philosophical reasoning is unapparent in Rembrandt, Proust demonstrates a less explicit and much subtler connection in thought from the experience of the viewer and the painter:

> Nous faisons tous comme le philosophe en regardant le ciel, mais nous ne cherchons pas comme lui à prendre conscience de notre joie ou de notre angoisse, de leur essence ou de leur raison. Sans doute même le peintre qui a peint ce philosophe n'a pas raisonné comme le philosophe. (*CSB*, p. 381)

Rembrandt's painting of the philosopher, according to Proust, effuses a power that does not direct one to reason, but to enter a quasi-philosophical tranquillity where the active and conscious thinker disappears, just as when Proust imagines Rembrandt 'lui-même étant tranquille (en ce qui concerne son œuvre) une fois qu'elle est finie'.[56] Here, the 'pensée' relates to an unaffected state of mind free from the control of the individual, similar to the idea of creativity which Proust expresses in relation to the works of Gustave Moreau,

> Nous avons beau demander ce que le maître voulait faire, on ne peut guère nous répondre puisque lui-même n'a pu se répondre en lui-même qu'en faisant cette *Courtisane sur sa terrasse*. (*CSB*, p. 667)

Here the artist is no longer responsible for the correct explanations for his work, just as what Proust emphasises in his anti-Sainte-Beuve arguments on authorship, that is, the identity of the author depends on something other than the individual. Merleau-Ponty proposes a 'prépersonnelle' vision that omits the traditionally accepted idea of

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[55] Fromentin, *Les Maîtres d'autrefois*, p. 407.

[56] *CSB*, p. 662.

a particular subject, suggesting that 'on perçoit en moi et non pas je perçois'.[57] And thus, in this manner one embeds oneself into the experience where 'je m'enfonce dans ce mystère' and 'il se pense en moi', which indicates a primordial indistinctness and comprehensiveness that provide 'un horizon de choses non vues ou même non visibles'.[58] Proust delineates the beauty of a Rembrandt with an undefinable timelessness where all the known and the unknown co-exist:

> [N]ous regardons le ciel dont nous avons partout connu le reflet sur la terre, ce reflet que nous ne connaîtrons jamais et que nous connaissons si bien, qui est la beauté de tout ce que nous avons jamais vu, qui en est aussi le mystère et l'inconnu. (*CSB*, p. 381)

The beauty of light in Rembrandt's paintings possesses for Proust almost a 'puissance divine', a Merleau-Pontian term which Nicoletta Salomon uses to describe the artist who becomes part of 'cette force mystérieuse' and 'le montre dans les signes de [sa] peinture' through a method that resembles translation.[59] Such an appreciation of the mysterious forces instead of the actual objects of art converges with the taste for indistinctness in Monet and Turner as analysed in the previous chapter, anticipating a modern artistic embrace of the primordial that foments the birth of abstract expressions, for instance when colour for Klee, just as Rembrandt's light for Proust, is what possesses the painter, not vice versa. As Klee relates, 'Die Farbe hat mich. Ich und die Farbe sind eins. Ich bin Maler' (La couleur me possède, je suis un avec la couleur, je suis peintre).[60]

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[57] *PP*, p. 249.

[58] Ibid., p. 248.

[59] Salomon, 'Les Artistes savent-ils ce qu'ils font?', p. 53.

[60] Ibid., p. 51.

The hint of primordiality in Rembrandt as Proust observes, however, is seldom detached from the materiality of the painting practice. The term 'pensée' turns out to be a synonym of 'matière dorée' in Proust's comments, revealing an ambiguous interrelationship between material and spirit.[61] Returning to Proust's description of M. Beulier, whose personality in *Jean Santeuil* exemplifies the very idea of spirituality to which the young Proust attributes his similar admiration for Rembrandt, Ruskin, and Moreau, the reference to Titian interestingly reveals, instead of a divergence from, a slight inclination towards a reconciliation between body and spirit in the perception of human identity in Proust. Such an inclination is better understood through the Merleau-Pontian definition of the neither material nor spiritual body, as the highly spiritual portraits in Rembrandt slowly unfold in Proust's appreciation of bodily charged postures, breaths, and gazes.

1.3 Posture and gesture

On the perception of an individual, Merleau-Ponty underlines that 'un geste quelquefois porte toute la vérité d'un homme', an idea deeply rooted in the intertwined relationship between body and thought.[62] He proposes the impossibility of pure thoughts by suggesting the embeddedness of all thoughts within a certain situation. Therefore, by recognising 'une pensée située, impliquée, ici et au présent',[63] perceiving an individual largely relies on a vision of 'un être en

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[61] *CSB*, p. 660.

[62] Merleau-Ponty, *Signes*, p. 96.

[63] Salomon, 'Les Artistes savent-ils ce qu'ils font?', p. 48.

situation'.[64] In this light, the body (la chair) as 'le seul moyen que j'ai d'aller au cœur des choses'[65] with its ambiguous nature which is neither material nor spiritual,[66] defines precisely a being when it 'se meut vers une chose'.[67] The body is thus understood as a system of possible actions, as a 'puissance de certains gestes'.[68]

In describing aged people in *Jean Santeuil*, Proust presents a series of 'gesture studies' that highlight the essentiality of gestures that summarise several characters including M. Beulier, the parents, and the grandfather of Jean:

> Aussi le geste dont ils la regardent, geste de tendre blâme, de muette admiration, de mélancolique amour, du souhait infini et irréalisé du bonheur qu'ils lui auraient voulu, est-il toujours un geste, un regard en l'air pour ainsi dire, accompagné parfois d'un de ces gestes de tête où il y a du tremblement de la vieillesse, du hochement de ce qu'on ne peut exprimer, de sorte que le geste exprime le doute, blâme, découragement ou incertitude, tandis que les yeux sont pleins d'amour. (*JS*, p. 246)

[64] *PP*, p. 487.

[65] *VI*, p. 178.

[66] Ibid., p. 181.

[67] *PP*, p. 372.

[68] Ibid., p. 289.

Figure 9

Rembrandt, *Christ and the Woman Taken in Adultery*, 1644, oil on oak, 83.8 x 65.4 cm, The National Gallery, London.

Figure 10

Rembrandt, *Portrait of an Old Jew*, 1654, canvas, 109 x 85 cm, Hermitage Museum, Saint Petersburg.

The attention towards gesture in Proust's description of people is also observable in a vision that underlines the parts of body that embed a potential for movement. For instance, the previously quoted word portrait of M. Beulier highlights the facial features of the philosophy teacher as well as the appearance of his hands, framing a half-length portrait that brings forth the presence of the face and hands against all other elements including the build and clothing (Proust particularly mentions M. Beulier as 'médiocrement habillé' and 'ni beau ni laid').[69] In a similar manner,

[69] *JS*, p. 269.

Rembrandt's bust portraits such as *Homer* (figure 6) and *Portrait of an Old Jew* (figure 10), by solely foregrounding the face and hands of the sitters with highlights of bright opaque colours of white, gold, and rose, leave the rest of the body almost invisible, drowning in the slightly transparent black shadows. These portraits with a virtuosity in chiaroscuro that renders a pronounced presence of the head and hands, become a synonym of gesture. Accompanied by such a shadow effect, the robes of Homer and the old Jew as well as those of Christ in *Christ and the Woman Taken in Adultery* (figure 9) and *The Supper at Emmaus* (figure 11), are depicted in particularly sombre hues, almost melting into the background. These paintings of Rembrandt also reveal his drawing techniques that emphasise gestures as Merleau-Pontian 'intentions' rather than forms. Although without clear and fluid lines like those in Raphael, as Schwartz suggests, Rembrandt's paintings better present a sense of gravity that highlights a structural relationship involving forces and feelings.[70]

[70] Schwartz, *Rembrandt's Universe*, p. 93.

Figure 11

Rembrandt, *The Supper at Emmaus*, 1648, oil on panel, 68 x 65 cm, Louvre, Paris.

Figure 12

Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio, *Supper at Emmaus*, 1601, canvas, 141 × 196.2 cm, the National Gallery, London.

In observing the postures and gestures in Rembrandt, Proust delineates the converging styles of bodily expression in *Christ and the Woman Taken in Adultery* (figure 9), *The Supper at Emmaus* (figure 11), and *Homer* (figure 6):

> [E]t qui, Christ près de la femme adultère, Homère, Christ des Pèlerins d'Emmaüs ont le corps étriqué, le geste détendu, pieusement asservi à la pensée qu'ils auraient peur de rompre, de fausser en se tendant, de ceux qui pensent, dont tout le corps est attentif à leur pensée, et les yeux non pas droits et fiers, mais fixes, remplis d'une pensée que c'est notre pensée qui recueille et reconnaît dans leurs orbites respectueuses de ce qu'ils contiennent, et tendus à ne pas la laisser échapper, et le dos voûté volontiers et l'air humble, comme si toute grande pensée, d'Homère ou du Christ, était plus grande qu'eux-mêmes, comme si penser grandement, profondément c'était justement penser avec un tel respect qu'on ne laisse rien échapper de la pensée. (*CSB*, pp. 661-62)

Proust's reading of Rembrandt's depiction of human figures is at once emphatic on the level of gestures and postures, focusing on the 'corps étriqué', 'le geste détendu', and 'le dos voûté volontiers',[71] and appreciative of the effort to reduce forced and theatrical element to a minimum as commonly seen in other works on similar subjects, as Brown points out.[72] The simple gesture in Rembrandt, which according to Proust is 'pieusement asservi à la pensée', at the same time relaxed and attentive, is the defining feature of the master's works which, as Brown comments, are 'of style and not of manner',[73] in which the element of posing stressed by Rubens, as Kuznetsov suggests, is almost invisible.[74] It is interesting to note the contrast in the style of gesture in the two tableaux of the same subject by

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[71] *CSB*, pp. 661-62.

[72] Brown, *Rembrandt, a Study of His Life and Work*, p. 319.

[73] Ibid.

[74] Kuznetsov, *Rembrandt Harmensz van Rijn: Paintings from Soviet Museums*, p. 2.

Rembrandt and Caravaggio (*Supper at Emmaus* (figure 12)). In the Caravaggio, the stretching arms and pointing finger perfectly illustrate the shock of revelation depicted culminating in a 'specular moment' in the term of Michael Fried,[75] where the artist almost bursts with a shout 'look!' towards the audience. By contrast, the figures in Rembrandt's tableau, not outwardly directing the viewer's attention to any signifying gestures, as Proust points out, retain 'l'air humble' with a silent respect as if any dramatic movement would break the 'grande pensée'.[76]

Figure 13

Rembrandt, *Ahasuerus and Haman at the Feast of Esther*, 1660, canvas, 73 × 94 cm, Pushkin Museum, Moscow.

[75] Michel Fried, *The Moment of Caravaggio* (Princeton; Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2010), p. 39.

[76] *CSB*, p. 662.

This is not to say that Rembrandt's depiction of momentous scenes lacks intensity, since the tension of the significant moment is rendered all the more profound in the manner of a body portrayal which is rather Proustian, devoid of outward dramatism and suggestive of slight movements with great prudence. For instance, in *Ahasuerus and Haman at the Feast of Esther* (figure 13) that represents the moment when Esther reveals her Jewish identity and denounces Haman to the king Ahasuerus for his crime of executing Jews, the reserved postures of the three figures deepen the crisis of the moment: Haman nervously holds his goblet, apparently losing all his appetite, the queen opens her hands in her speech with fingers naturally unfolded in simple parallels (unlike the twisting or theatrically pointing and stretching fingers in Caravaggio), and the king, steadily holding his sword with his right hand, slightly bends his head likely in a mental debate as Xenia Yegorova suggests, one in which he is 'preoccupied not so much with the fates of Haman and Esther as with the problem of good and evil in the world, veracity and perfidy of human nature'.[77] In this way, the universality of the act of thinking in Rembrandt's depiction of the king equally illustrates the embodied attitude of great thinkers for whom 'tout le corps est attentif' and who 'ne laisse[nt] rien échapper de la pensée' as underlined by Proust.[78]

The economy of pose and gesture suggested in the 'corps étriqué', 'le geste détendu' and 'le dos voûté volontiers' also indicates the often laconic composition in

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[77] Yegorova, *Rembrandt Harmensz van Rijn: Paintings from Soviet Museums*, p. 25.

[78] *CSB*, pp. 661-62.

Rembrandt where the figures are arranged in a manner that minimises the mannerist element of forced curves and intricate geometric relations.[79] In *Christ and the Woman Taken in Adultery* as well as *The Return of the Prodigal Son*, Rembrandt similarly utilises a column-like layout of the figures in the tableau, without any of the sharp angles that usually appear in Caravaggio, while producing not the least effect of stiffness. The composition of *Prodigal Son*, recognised by Irene Linnik as 'laconic and supremely expressive', masterfully displays the subtle variation of the position of the father's two hands and the two feet of the prodigal son, the modestly tilted head of the father and slightly differing angles of the heads of the various accompanying figures.[80] These subtle dynamics of the body, presenting an almost unconscious state, like in Proust's description that the body is 'pieusement asservi à la pensée qu'ils auraient peur de rompre', suggest a movement of the figures depicted close to the Merleau-Pontian notion of vibration and radiation. As quoted in the previous chapter, Merleau-Ponty refers to Rodin's comment on the body that 'toute chair, et même celle du monde, rayonne hors d'elle-même', when he underlines the movement in the painting which is 'sans déplacement', suggested by the visions that are 'convenablement brouillées' and the postures that are suspended 'entre un avant et un après'.[81] Instead of an absolute stillness, the laconic composition of Rembrandt reveals through the subtle gestures of the figures the 'raccords fictifs'[82]

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[79] Ibid., p. 661.

[80] Linnik, *Rembrandt Harmensz van Rijn: Paintings from Soviet Museums*, p. 27.

[81] *ŒE*, p. 77.

[82] Ibid.

of movement between different parts of the body in Rodin's terms, and thus portrays a thinking body according to Proust's analysis.

When it comes to Rembrandt's close portraits of aged people with their 'dos voûté volontiers et l'air humble' as Proust celebrates in his description of Homer, the movement of 'rayonnement' is more profoundly embedded in the subtle tendencies of the gesture of their folded hands and their attentively inclining poses.[83] Works such as *Homer* and *Portrait of an Old Jew* (figure 10), as Jacob points out, admit 'a certain helplessness and vulnerability',[84] echoing Proust's constant consideration of 'tremblement' in his depiction of old people such as Ruskin in 'Rembrandt' and M. Sandré in *Jean Santeuil*. In this respect, Rembrandt's brushstroke manner that eliminates sharp contours and creates a glowing effect of the flesh also resonates with the idea of movement in the figure.

1.4 Breathing portraits

As previously analysed, what Proust underlines in the art of Rembrandt, different from the Caravaggioesque dramatisation of gesture, is the relaxed body with an almost unconscious potential for movement. As can be observed in *Homer*, the postures and gestures are just enough to depict a living figure. Brown suggests that, although no Raphaelesque beauty is discernible in Rembrandt, his homely treatment of sacred themes grants the human figures an air of intimacy and tender

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[83] Ibid.

[84] John Jacob and Rembrandt Harmenszoon van Rijn, *Rembrandt* (Secaucus, N.J.: Chartwell Books, 1990), p. 312.

compassion,[85] for example with Christ in *The Supper at Emmaus* who is depicted as a 'living, breathing being'.[86]

The vision of a breathing being is of particular interest to Proust in his word portrait of M. Santeuil in *Jean Santeuil*. When Jean returns home late, he observes his mother asleep in her room with 'le nez respirant',[87] and the scene of Jean and his mother contemplating M. Santeuil asleep is elaborately described with an attentive gaze on the movement of the old man's breathing:

> Jean releva la tête et vit que sa mère regardait M. Santeuil sans parler. […] Ses sourcils étaient froncés, sa bouche faisait la moue, mais maintenant qu'il ne regardait plus, on n'en démêlait pas le sens, qu'on devinait caché sous les paupières exactement fermées de ses yeux, et toute la figure restait saisissante et obscure, comme une intention forte mais impénétrable. On entendait régulièrement le flux et le reflux de sa respiration. Bruit qui n'était organisé par aucune idée, produit selon aucun désir, qui n'était ni une parole ni un chant, mais bien un bruit sourd qui bruissait sans s'entendre, voisin et mystérieux comme le bruit des flots de la mer sur le sable ou du vent dans les feuilles. (*JS*, pp. 878-79)

The sleeping figure of M. Santeuil radiates a charm which is 'saisissante et obscure' for the protagonist, similar to the air of the Rembrandt portraits such as *Portrait of the Poet Jeremias de Decker* and *Head of Christ* (figure 14), where the figures half immersed in the darkness synesthetically evoke a silent ambience, in which the slightest sound is perceivable, just as the sound of breath in which Proust's protagonist absorbs himself. The outlines of the figures in Rembrandt that

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[85] Brown, pp. 280-81.

[86] Ibid., p. 289.

[87] *JS*, p. 855.

Figure 14

Rembrandt (attr.), *Head of Christ*, c. 1655, oil on oak panel, 23.8 x 12.2 cm, Netherlands Institute for Cultural Heritage, Amsterdam.

seldom stand sharply against the background create an existence 'enfumée d'incertitudes' as Fromentin points out, resembling an impression of breath that subtly alters the position of the sitter in a rhythmic manner.[88] Such a breathing effect in the portraits with blurred outlines that exemplifies 'the enigma of the visible' underlined by Merleau-Ponty as Michel Haar comments,[89] is the result of

[88] Fromentin, *Les Maîtres d'autrefois*, p. 399.

[89] Michel Haar, 'Painting, Perception, Affectivity', in *Merleau-Ponty: Difference, Materiality*, p. 177.

Rembrandt's colouring method on tinted grounds.[90] Different from the Venetian method that lays in dead colours first which are later finished by transparent glazes, Rembrandt's handling approaches the Flemish method of Rubens that starts with transparent rubbings to be painted into with opaque colours mixed with white.[91] In addition, with their continuous modulation that constantly varies the brushstroke manner and colour combination, and engages with the alternation between solidity and transparency, Rembrandt's tableaux skilfully represent a vision of individuals whose breathing movements are equally appreciated by Proust.[92]

The similarities in style and gesture between the portraits by Rembrandt and the depiction of figures in Proust, however, are not limited to the specific act of breathing, but rather, convey the very idea of a breathing vision, based on which Merleau-Ponty foregrounds the implication of the act of 'respiration' in the notion of artistic 'inspiration'.[93] According to Merleau-Ponty, 'vivre dans la peinture, c'est encore respirer ce monde'[94] with a certain 'porosité' at the boundary of perception[95] that associates the inside with the outside, namely, the body with the world.[96] And due to the corporal nature of breathing, this interconnection lacks the complete awareness and full intention of the perceiving subject. In the description of the

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[90] Schwartz, *Rembrandt's Universe*, p. 88.

[91] Brown, p. 295.

[92] Schwartz, *Rembrandt's Universe*, p. 237.

[93] *ŒE*, pp. 30-32.

[94] Merleau-Ponty, *Signes*, p. 81.

[95] *VI*, p. 195.

[96] Fabrice Lambert, 'La Porosité à la frontière du corps', in *L'Œil et l'esprit: Maurice Merleau-Ponty entre art et philosophie*, pp. 30-33.

sleeping M. Santeuil in *Jean Santeuil*, Proust deliberately associates the particular unconscious state and the movement of breathing:

> Jean et sa mère continuaient à regarder M. Santeuil sans parler, sans oser se regarder, chacun craignant de trouver sans doute dans les yeux de l'autre la pensée qu'un jour M. Santeuil ne se réveillerait plus jamais. Ne s'endormirait pas non plus. Car ils sentaient que ce sommeil, c'était encore la vie, plus peut-être que la veille. À ce moment où cette vie, qui devait un jour quitter M. Santeuil, le possédait encore et sans qu'il en eût conscience, elle paraissait chose plus grande encore que quand il était réveillé, où sa vie ne semblait plus que l'émanation de sa pensée et de sa volonté. Oui: une grande chose puissante, et M. Santeuil semblait seulement son jouet fragile, inconscient et usé, mais sur lequel elle veillait pendant qu'il dormait. Tant qu'elle ne le quitterait pas, il pouvait avoir confiance, s'abandonner. Et en effet ses bras tombaient plus inversement le long de son corps, ses joues blanches pendaient maintenant sans expression le long de sa bouche détendue. Et le bruit, régulier continuait toujours, l'œuvre de vie et de mort, l'œuvre de temps ne s'arrêtait pas. La tête de M. Santeuil s'abaissait de plus en plus, cependant que sa poitrine se soulevait régulièrement, ballottée comme une chose inerte si près de Jean et de sa mère avec un bruit égal. Ils ne pouvaient pas se détourner de ce spectacle aveugle de la vie et où éclatait d'autant plus sa puissance. (*JS*, p. 879)

This paragraph echoes the comments in 'Rembrandt' where Proust highlights the relaxed bodies of Christ and Homer piously listening to thoughts greater than themselves, whereas here the sleep of M. Santeuil renders an unconscious state of life in the form of breathing even greater than life manifested in the awakened body controlled by intentions and thoughts. Merleau-Ponty underlines the neither material nor spiritual nature of the body, thus replacing the Cartesian notion of pure thought with an understanding that disrupts the boundary between reason and the senses. In Proust's attempt to capture life in the description of the old M. Santeuil, a similar understanding is revealed in his predilection for the very idea of breathing which is unconscious and automatic and yet constitutes the fundamental characteristic of a body in the 'entrelacs' between the inside and the outside.

1.5 The Gaze

It is worth noting that Proust's close-up observations of the figures in Rembrandt's paintings seldom touch upon physiognomic description. For instance, the facial features of Homer and Christ are not grasped in their physical appearance in Proust's 'Rembrandt', but are associated through a common perception of the 'regard':

> [C]e regard qui a compris et qui est doux, du Christ devant la femme adultère, ce regard du poète qui se redit les vers avec tout leur sens, de l'*Homère*, ce regard qui voit toutes les misères, qui a toutes les tendresses et qui a comme envie de pleurer, du Christ des Pèlerins d'Emmaüs. (*CSB*, p. 661)

Proust extracts from the paintings of human figures in Rembrandt their 'regard' almost as an essence as significant as the light that illuminates the tableaux of the artist's third phase. This vision reveals exactly Rembrandt's change in emphasis of human portrayal towards his mature stage of creativity. As Kuznetsov points out, Rembrandt's focus on physiognomy studies in the early 1630s underwent a shift to a psychological depiction from the 1640s onwards, notably through an attention to the gaze of the sitter such as that in *Portrait of an Old Jew* (figure 10).[97] The mature Rembrandt is no longer interested in iconographic systems or codes, as Jacob argues, which means all the artist's expressive capability is dedicated to the direct language of the gaze.[98] The gaze in Rembrandt as underlined by Proust, resonates with the phenomenological understanding of the visage in a painting proposed by Merleau-Ponty:

> [U]n visage n'exprime quelque chose que par l'arrangement des couleurs et des lumières qui le composent, le sens de ce regard n'est pas derrière des

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[97] Kuznetsov, *Rembrandt Harmensz van Rijn: Paintings from Soviet Museums*, p. 14.

[98] Jacob, *Rembrandt*, p. 306.

> yeux, il est sur eux, et une touche de couleur en plus ou en moins suffit au peintre pour transformer le regard d'un portrait. (*PP*, p. 372)

The very dynamics of the 'regard' in painting that, according to Merleau-Ponty, reside in the combination of the phenomenal elements, provides an explanation for the profoundness in Proust's reading of Rembrandt's portraits, which neither seeks sole justification in allegorical connotation nor relies on a mere combination of physical traits of appearance. The gaze here represents a culmination of the charm of the face for Proust and Rembrandt.

Figure 15

Rembrandt, *Portrait of an old Woman*, 1654, canvas, 84 x 109 cm, Hermitage Museum, Saint Petersburg.

As for the particular gazes depicted in Rembrandt cited previously, Proust underlines in each of the three tableaux an expression of humbleness and compassion, echoing his description of 'une douceur' and certain 'tristesse' in old

people towards their children in *Jean Santeuil*. Such a description portrays an affection with a 'pensif' quality,[99] which as previously indicated, contrary to the Caravaggioesque moment of exclamation, pertains to a state of existence in long duration, with the eyes 'fixes'.[100] What Proust observes here in the gaze of Homer and Christ also reveals another essential quality that Rembrandt constantly demonstrates in his portraits, which is, as Schwartz points out, the inward gaze that 'may close [the thinking figures] off from direct contact with us' without losing all appeal.[101] The thinkers portrayed by Rembrandt such as Jeremias de Decker and Aristotle (in *Aristotle with a Bust of Homer* (figure 7)), often stare into the middle distance, with an ambiguity as to the actual object being gazed at, as in *Portrait of an Old Woman* (figure 15), as Brown analyses, which might suggest a withdrawal from the 'interests of the hour' and a mind brooding over the experience of a whole lifetime.[102] Such a depiction of the gaze resonates with Proust's constant portrayal of old people tenderly staring into their memory in *Jean Santeuil*, such as in M. Sandré's frequent moments of remembrance[103] and the 'petite flamme' in the eyes of M. Martial that seems to be glowing from a distant past.[104] This inward tendency of the gaze preferred by Rembrandt and Proust, can also be considered as a manifestation of an artistic inclination that directs towards the inside, or rather the undetachable

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[99] *JS*, p. 866.

[100] *CSB*, p. 662.

[101] Schwartz, *Rembrandt's Universe*, p. 312.

[102] Brown, p. 277.

[103] *JS*, p. 243.

[104] Ibid., p. 455.

chiasma of the body and the world, a desire of the vision, as Merleau-Ponty states, to 'assister du dedans à la fission de l'Être, au terme de laquelle seulement je me ferme sur moi'.[105]

The gaze of the eyes which are 'non pas droits et fiers, mais fixes' of Christ and Homer, particularly with the latter being a blind poet, suggests also a predilection for the portrayal of vulnerability, which approaches the idea of 'les yeux mi-clos, pas trop de lumière' in Salomon's analysis of Merleau-Ponty's primordial portrayal of vision.[106] Such a state conveyed in the gaze, similarly seen in the view of the sea behind the half-closed eyelid analysed in the previous chapter, is not rare in Rembrandt who not only superbly depicts the gazing subject, for instance the father in *Prodigal Son* with his eyes half closed in frailty, but also with his virtuosity renders the whole atmosphere in a perfect chiaroscuro that almost imitates the vision of such a gaze.[107] The poetics of invisibility that Merleau-Ponty interrogates in the role of the artist that foregrounds the idea of negativity, equally exists in the potential of the ambiguous gaze in Proust and Rembrandt.[108]

The uniqueness of the gaze, as Merleau-Ponty puts forward, resides in a certain 'puissance' of the eye to 'rejoindre les choses' instead of simply serving as 'un

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[105] *ŒE*, p. 81.

[106] Salomon, 'Les Artistes savent-ils ce qu'ils font?', pp. 52-53.

[107] Mieke Bal also notices the frequent occurrence of blindness in Rembrandt's œuvre, with or without thematic reasons for attention to problematic sight of the depicted figures. *Reading Rembrandt: Beyond the Word-Image Opposition* (Cambridge: Cambridge U Press, 1991), p. 327.

[108] Kristensen, L'Innocence de l'artiste', pp. 19-20.

écran où [les choses] se projettent',[109] which indicates 'l'engagement de notre corps dans les structures typiques d'un monde'.[110] In this sense, the notion of 'regard' in the tableaux of Rembrandt is no longer limited to a depicted image, but refers to a much more pregnant intermediator that associates multiple subjects including the painted figure, the artist, and the viewer.

In Proust's comments, the gazes of the figures in Rembrandt's works are already the incarnation of the gaze of the artist himself 'au fond de chacune de ses toiles', a fundamental image that contributes to Proust's idea of the immortality of the artist.[111] When he comments on Gustave Moreau who illustrates this idea, similarly to Rembrandt's works, he makes a reference to one woman 'qui nous regarde' in one of Moreau's works, who manifests 'la pensée de Gustave Moreau peinte sur cette toile qui nous regarde de ces beaux yeux d'aveugle que sont les couleurs pensées'.[112]

Furthermore, the gaze in the tableau is at the same time where the viewers' gaze is engaged, as Proust recognises that the eyes of Homer and Christ are 'remplis d'une pensée que c'est notre pensée qui recueille et reconnaît dans leurs orbites respectueuses de ce qu'ils contiennent'.[113] In this way, Proust's comprehension of gaze in painting realises an inter-personal encounter which is represented in *Jean Santeuil* by scenes where certain characters quietly contemplate other people, as if

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[109] *PP*, p. 322.

[110] Ibid., p. 358.

[111] *CSB*, p. 661.

[112] Ibid., p. 671.

[113] Ibid., p. 661.

in a painter-sitter or viewer-portrait dynamic, sometimes even with a subtle reciprocity. For example, Mme Santeuil observes her aging father with an attentive look,[114] and similarly, her father envelopes her with a sorrowful, caring gaze in an echoing paragraph later in the narrative.[115] The intertwined roles between the portrayed subject and the viewer in the art of portrait painting are thus appreciated and fully grasped by Proust. Merleau-Ponty cites Saint-Exupéry, 'l'homme n'est qu'un nœud de relations',[116] and the embodiment of these relations, as demonstrated by Proust in that which he and Rembrandt equally seek to emphasise, resides in the 'regard'. According to Merleau-Ponty, as vision is always accompanied by a complementary vision of the self being seen from the outside,[117] as pointed out in Chatper 2, the gaze also contains an intention of being seen,[118] which aptly applies to the art of portrait that inevitably involves and relies on the collaboration between three parts: the sitter, the artist, and the spectator, as Malcolm Warner suggests.[119] The significance of gaze is well summarised by Proust in his comments on Moreau, in whose work the gaze of the figure in the tableau becomes a synonym of an artist's vision that 'continue d'être vue, elle est devant nous, cela est tout ce qu'il faut'.[120]

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[114] *JS*, p. 244.

[115] Ibid., pp. 245-46.

[116] *PP*, p. 520.

[117] *VI*, p. 177.

[118] Ibid., p. 184.

[119] Malcolm Warner, *Portrait Painting* (New York: Hawthorne Books, 1979), p. 78.

[120] *CSB*, p. 671.

II Ambiguity of bodily beauty: elegance in Van Dyck

2.1 Beauty of physiognomy

In the appreciation of the gaze in Rembrandt, Proust already conveys his predilection in portraits for the arrangement of colour and form per se. As Merleau-Ponty explains, the gaze resides not behind the eyes as a deeper layer of connotation, but is 'sur les yeux'.[121] Such an aesthetic elevates phenomenological aspects of the perception of an individual against the artificiality of symbols and narratives and the abstractness of the idea of spirit. The essay written as a word portrait of Alphonse Daudet, 'La Personne d'Alphonse Daudet' with a subtitle '"œuvre d'art"', reveals precisely a discussion of the vision that Proust seeks to define. Proust describes the charm of the person thus:

> Moins physique que la beauté, moins spirituelle que la noblesse de l'esprit et du caractère, elle est, si l'on veut, comme l'habitude de cette noblesse, c'est-à-dire cette noblesse devenue inconsciente, convertie en belles lignes du corps et du visage, en mouvements larges et simples, de la noblesse qui a pris corps. (*CSB*, p. 399-400)

The nobility of Alphonse Daudet, as Proust foregrounds, consists in a tension that confronts the Cartesian dichotomy of material and spirit. The 'belles lignes du corps et du visage', in this manner, are not the symbols or representations of, but the very nobility itself of M. Daudet.[122] Proust further puts forward a distinction of the

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[121] *PP*, p. 372.

[122] Ibid.

nobility from, as well as its superiority to, the concept of idea in the concluding paragraph:

> Cette œuvre d'art délicate et sublime qu'est M. Daudet, et où la nature, dans un langage autrement expressif et vivant que le nôtre, à travers des prunelles plus transparentes que notre style, plus profondes que nos pensées, une peau plus purement colorée que nos images. (*CSB*, p. 402)

The Platonic concepts of 'style', 'pensées', and 'images' (likely referring to the imagination of the mind), are considered a hollow and pale existence when compared with M. Daudet's nature that his eyes and skin speak to, while as previously quoted, the characteristic of being 'moins physique que la beauté' denies at the same time a stiff presence of physical properties. Like his emphasis of 'air' in the tableaux of Gustave Moreau,[123] Proust demonstrates an inclination towards the visual qualities which according to Merleau-Ponty 'nous introduisent dans une atmosphère'[124] or synchronise with 'certain rythme d'existence'.[125]

It is worth noting that in defining such an atmosphere produced by M. Daudet, Proust alludes to 'une véritable grâce royale' in *Charles I at the Hunt* (figure 16) painted by Van Dyck.[126] The painting, along with other royal portraits such as *Portrait of James Stuart, Duke of Lennox and Richmond* (figure 22) and *Portrait of the Three Eldest Children of Charles I* in the Louvre, were contemplated repeatedly by the young Proust, who dedicated a poem to the artist in 'Portraits de peintres',

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[123] Ibid., p. 668.

[124] Ibid., p. 370.

[125] Ibid., p. 247.

[126] *CSB*, p. 400.

and recounted a visit of his protagonist Jean to see the portrait of the Duke of Richmond in *Jean Santeuil*.

Figure 16

Anthony van Dyck, *Charles I at the Hunt*, c. 1635, canvas, 272 x 212 cm, Louvre, Paris.

According to Proust in 'Portrait de peintre', Van Dyck miraculously preserves

> Douce fierté des cœurs, grâce noble des choses,
> Qui brillent dans les yeux, les velours et les bois,
> Beau language élevé du maintien et des poses (*JS*, p. 81)

This reading of the portrait works of Van Dyck including *Charles I at the Hunt*, *Portrait of James Stuart, Duke of Lennox and Richmond*, and *Portrait of the Three Eldest Children of Charles I* demonstrates Proust's appreciation of the in-between quality which is less abstract than what he emphasises in Rembrandt and more alive than

mere accounts of physiognomy and attire. As a former assistant of Rubens, Van Dyck impressed the English court with his lively and realistic rendition of human figures that drastically contrasted with the stiff two-dimensional representations of his English contemporaries such as Nicholas Hilliard.[127] At the same time, he differed from his master by emphasising the depiction of 'the story of individual experience, rather than the epic sweep of history, enacted on a grand stage', through the techniques of light and colour treatment acquired from an observation of Venetian masters such as Titian, Veronese, and Tintoretto.[128] Proust's overall preference for the artist lies within such an interlaced vision between Flemish and Italian aesthetics, and his particular observations of the atmospheric qualitiy in *Charles I at the Hunt* (figure 16) and *Portrait of the Three Eldest Children Of Charles I* in the following lines of 'Portraits de peintres' illustrate a similar symphathetic gaze:

> Halte de cavaliers, sous les pins, près des flots
> Calmes comme eux — comme eux bien proches des sanglots —,
> Enfants royaux déjà magnifiques et graves,
> Vêtements résignés, chapeaux à plumes braves,
> Et bijoux en qui pleure — onde à travers les flammes —
> L'amertume des pleurs dont sont pleines les âmes
> Trop hautaines pour les laisser monter aux yeux; (*JS*, p. 81)

[127] Christopher White, and Anton Van Dyck, *Anthony van Dyck: Thomas Howard, the Earl of Arundel* (Malibu, Calif.: Getty Museum, 1995), p. 62.

[128] Susan J. Barnes, 'The Young Van Dyck and Rubens', in *Van Dyck: Paintings* (Washington: National Gallery of Art, 1991), p. 23.

Figure 17

Anthony van Dyck, *Emanuele Filiberto of Savoy*, 1624, canvas, 126 x 99.6 cm, Dulwich Picture Gallery, London.

Figure 18

Anthony van Dyck, *Thomas Howard, 2nd Earl of Arundel*, 1620-21, canvas, 102.8 x 79.4 cm, The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles.

Figure 19

Anthony van Dyck, *Jacomo de Cachiopin*, 1634, canvas, 111 x 84.5 cm, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna.

Figure 20

Anthony van Dyck, *Cornelis van der Geest*, 1619-20, oil on panel, 37.5 x 32.5 cm, National Gallery, London.

Here, Proust discerns the coexistence of an aristocratic countenance that persists in Van Dyck's œuvre (for instance the majestic and worshipful air of *Emanuele Filiberto of Savoy* (figure 17) and *Thomas Howard, 2nd Earl of Arundel* (figure 18)), and a melancholic and tender quality that permeates the figures with their dress and surroundings in the tableaux (especially pronounced in works like *Jacomo de Cachiopin* (figure 19) that portrays a melancholic state of mind in the 'wan

complexion'[129] and *Cornelis van der Geest* (figure 20) depicting a concerned look in the eyes that glisten a similar 'l'amertume des pleurs').

The grasp of the specific temperament in the works of Van Dyck, as previously pointed out, reveals an appreciation of human figures in Proust that is seldom detached from the gaze on the body. As Proust underlines in the person of Alphonse Daudet, 'en quelques rares artistes le corps a reçu comme l'âme la forme de la beauté'.[130] The comprehension of the notion of body here is situated between the idea of the 'corps objectif' and the 'corps phénoménal' in Merleau-Ponty's terms, since the noble qualities depicted in Van Dyck, 'prince des gestes calmes' as celebrated by Proust,[131] reside principally in the 'beau language élevé du maintien et des poses'.[132] It is through regarding the body not only as a physical entity, but also as a 'schéma' of habitual gestures, poses, and movements, that Proust contemplates the 'œuvre d'art' that is M. Daudet (cited previously):

> [C]omme l'habitude de cette noblesse, c'est-à-dire cette noblesse devenue inconsciente, convertie en belles lignes du corps et du visage, en mouvements larges et simples, de la noblesse qui a pris corps. (*CSB*, p. 400)

Such a meditation on the perception of the body modelled and expressed by habit can also be seen in Proust's comment on the traits of a family in the body that are not subject to change in *Jean Santeuil*:

> Les changements de l'individu se consomment dans l'espèce, mais l'individu reste attaché à sa nature primitive, en tant qu'elle est inscrite pour ainsi dire dans les lignes de sa figure, bonne ou méchante, de son corps, volontaire ou

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[129] Brown, p. 269.

[130] *CSB*, p. 399.

[131] *JS*, p. 81.

[132] *CSB*, p. 400.

> mou, et ce corps dans les habitudes dont a vécu sa famille, comme l'huître à sa coquille et sa coquille au rocher. [...] La coquille de Mme Santeuil c'est son corps; les chocs de la vie ont pu l'avarier, lui faire perdre le brillant éclat qui charmait jadis: la forme est bien restée la même. (*JS*, p. 875)

By firstly recognising the physicality of the body, the 'lignes de sa figure', and further pointing out the perception of 'les habitudes dont a vécu sa famille', Proust foregrounds a tension that also lies at the core of his vision of Alphonse Daudet and the art of Van Dyck.[133] A tension of the physical appearance of body and the very quality of temperament resides in the 'schéma corporel' in the terms of Merleau-Ponty, who suggests, 'les choses se définissent premièrement par leur "comportement" non par des "propriétés" statiques'.[134] Therefore, as Merleau-Ponty explains,

> Nous comprenons la chose comme nous comprenons un comportement nouveau, c'est-à-dire non pas par une opération intellectuelle de subsomption, mais en reprenant à notre compte le mode d'existence que les signes observables esquissent devant nous. Un comportement dessine une certaine manière de traiter le monde. (*PP*, p. 369)

In this way, the portrait of 'une femme' according to Merleau-Ponty, designates more 'l'emblème d'une manière d'habiter le monde' than a simple representation of physical attributes,[135] just as Van Dyck's portrait *Henry Danvers, Earl of Danby* (figure 21) that captures the countenance of the Earl by showing a resting finger on the

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[133] *JS*, p. 875.

[134] *PP*, p. 318.

[135] Merleau-Ponty, *Signes*, p. 68.

tablecloth, a gesture that the commander often makes on the plan of campaign as a lifelong habit.[136]

Figure 21

Anthony van Dyck, *Henry Danvers, Earl of Danby*, 1633-5, canvas, 223 x 130.6 cm, The State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg.

[136] Judy Egerton, *Van Dyck 1599-1641*, ed. by Christopher Brown, H. Vlieghe, Frans Baudouin, Till-Holger Borchert, Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten (Antwerpen), and Royal Academy of Arts (London) (München: Hirmer, 1999), p. 262.

2.2 The identity of an artist

In claiming that 'le véritable amour pour une œuvre d'art est chose rare' when commenting on the works of Gustave Moreau, Proust insists on a meta-level awareness of the irreplaceability of the significance of artists and their works.[137] And such an awareness is often accompanied with an enthusiasm to emulate the vision of an artist. In constantly returning to the notion of 'cette œuvre d'art' in his depiction of M. Daudet, Proust indicates a desire to view and create human figures from a painterly perspective, with the vigour and admiration which particularly belongs to artists.[138] In the biographical accounts given in his study on the Pre-Raphaelites presented in the article 'Dante Gabriel Rossetti et Élizabeth Siddal', Proust thus describes the situation of being loved by a painter:

> Et pourtant Élizabeth avait été tendrement aimée, aimée par l'homme et par le peintre, ce qui est être deux fois aimée, car les peintres ont une tendresse pour la créature qui réalise soudain devant eux, en une matière exquise et vivante, un rêve longtemps caressé, et portent sur elle des regards plus pleins de pensée, plus intuitifs et, pour tout dire, plus chargés d'amour que ne peuvent faire les autres hommes.[139]

The particular pensive and exquisite gaze of the painter that caresses an individual, echoes the way of looking manifest in Proust's description of *Portrait of James Stuart, Duke of Lennox and Richmond* (figure 22) in 'Portraits de peintres':

> Et toi par-dessus tous, promeneur précieux,
> En chemise bleu pâle, une main à la hanche,
> Dans l'autre un fruit feuillu détaché de la branche,
> Je rêve sans comprendre à ton geste et tes yeux.
> Debout, mais reposé, dans cet obscur asile,

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[137] *CSB*, p. 674.

[138] Ibid., p. 402.

[139] Ibid., p. 473.

Figure 22

Anthony van Dyck, *Portrait of James Stuart, Duke of Lennox and Richmond*, c. 1636, canvas, 107 x 84 cm, Louvre, Paris.

> Duc de Richmond, ô jeune sage! — ou charmant fou? —
> Je te reviens toujours: Un saphir, à ton cou,
> A des feux aussi doux que ton regard tranquille. (*JS*, pp. 81-2)

The attachment to the painting expressed in the poem already surpasses the objective evaluation of an art critic. Although the ekphrastic descriptions of the tenor and posture of the sitter correspond to the tableau, no indications of the physical presence of the painting can be seen in this poem. Moreover, the direct manner of addressing the duke 'toi' implies less an impassive comment, and more a loving confession from a subject yearning to decipher the troubling ambiguities in the expressions of the gestures and gaze of the admired person. The dreamy mental state and the nearly obsessive revisiting also reveal a correspondence to the gaze of

a loving painter described in the previously quoted paragraph. The identities of the viewer, the painter, and the sitter undergo an ambiguous exchange and intermingle, the complexity of which is also actualised by the protagonist in *Jean Santeuil* in viewing the same painting in the Louvre:

> [S]i près du Louvre, il n'eut pas le courage de résister au désir d'aller voir "le Duc de Richmond" de Van Dyck, et rentra chez lui se croyant un petit duc de Richmond parce que, pensif et beau comme lui, il allait se battre en duel. (*JS*, pp. 727-28)

In appreciating the art work, the protagonist becomes the Duke of Richmond himself. Therefore, the portrait painted by Van Dyck, far from being merely considered as an art work—a perceived object—becomes the point of superimposition of the identities of the viewer, the sitter, and the artist indicated in the imagined loving gaze.

In regards to the identity of an artist, it is important to note that Proust names his poems 'Portraits de peintres et de musiciens' while offering no account at all of the physical appearance or social characteristics of Van Dyck or the other artists.[140] Instead, it is through the descriptions of his works that the identity of Van Dyck is constructed. As previously mentioned, the vision of an artist is treated by Proust as a synonym for the artist himself, and the perception of a social self plays a lesser role: as he highlights, the artistic vision of Moreau culminates in a moment when '[l]a barrière du moi individuel dans lequel il était un homme comme les autres, est tombée'.[141] The self of an artist that evades the social frame of definition

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[140] *JS*, p. 81.

[141] *CSB*, p. 672.

is explicitly foregrounded by Proust in his criticism against Sainte-Beuve in 'La Méthode de Sainte-Beuve', which is thus described:

> cette méthode qui consiste à ne pas séparer l'homme et l'œuvre, à considérer qu'il n'est pas indifférent pour juger l'auteur d'un livre […] à s'entourer de tous les renseignements possibles pour un écrivain, à collationner ses correspondances, à interroger les hommes qui l'ont connu, en causant avec eux s'ils vivent encore, en lisant ce qu'ils ont pu écrire sur lui s'ils sont morts, cette méthode méconnaît ce qu'une fréquentation un peu profonde avec nous-même nous apprend: qu'un livre est le produit d'un autre moi que celui que nous manifestons dans nos habitudes, dans la société, dans nos vices. Ce moi-là, si nous voulons essayer de le comprendre, c'est au fond de nous-même, en essayant de le recréer en nous, que nous pouvons y parvenir. Rien ne peut nous dispenser de cet effort de notre cœur. (*CSB*, pp. 221-22)

Figure 23

Anthony van Dyck, *Self-portrait with Sir Endymion Porter*, 1635, canvas, 119 x 144 cm, Museo del Prado, Madrid.

Figure 24

Anthony van Dyck, *Self-portrait*, 1620-21, canvas, 119.7 x 87.9 cm, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

Proust underlines a fundamental effort of the self for a profound existence in the sphere of artistic creation instead of the quotidian. It is interesting to note that in his self-portraits such as *Self-portrait with Sir Endymion Porter* (figure 23) and *Self-portrait* (figure 24), Van Dyck always portrays himself with restrained simple costumes (especially in a drastic contrast to the elaborately dressed Sir Endymion in the double portrait) and with a less meticulous manner in the treatment of facial

features, producing a socially, and even physically, undefinable image. His existence of self is defined rather, as in Proust's comprehension of 'Portraits de peintres', by the revelation of his vision. According to Merleau-Ponty,

> On dit qu'un homme est né à l'instant où ce qui n'était au fond du corps maternel qu'un visible virtuel se fait à la fois visible pour nous et pour soi.[142]

The identity is formed, therefore, essentially through 'un visible virtuel', which Merleau-Ponty defines elsewhere as a notion close to 'la logique allusive de monde perçu',[143] and further as style in the domain of art which he defines as follows:

> Un style est une certaine manière de traiter les situations que j'identifie ou que je comprends dans un individu ou chez un écrivain en la reprenant à mon compte par une sorte de mimétisme, même si je suis hors d'état de la définir.[144]

The comprehension of style through identification and imitation explains the way that the perception of an artist is realised in Proust, especially in his own production of portraits similar to an artist's gaze and his insistence on the evaluation of a profound self. The notion of style is further extended in the *Recherche*. Towards the end of *Le temps retrouvé* where the protagonist reflects upon style and vision in literature and painting, Proust accentuates the significance of the 'différence qualitative' of the arts as opposed to techniques in revealing the multiple worlds in various artists,[145] exemplifying an effort to explore 'la nuance même du sentir'[146] as

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[142] *ŒE*, p. 32.

[143] Merleau-Ponty, *Signes*, p. 71.

[144] *PP*, p. 378

[145] *RTP*, IV (1989), p. 474.

[146] Merleau-Ponty, *Signes*, p. 65.

Merleau-Ponty delineates, shaping one of the fundamental pursuits of the quest of vision and creativity.

III The young Proust's fluid identity: Gustave Moreau and Jacques-Émile Blanche

Proust's celebration of the identity of an artist free from the limits of his or her everyday experience culminates in a perfect portrait when such a vision involves his own person. Whether in the portrait of an author suggested in his early writings on exhibitions or in the famous portrait of Proust painted by Jacques-Émile Blanche, an insistence on the multiplicity of identity is always present. The young Proust embodies an ambiguity in various facets, interrogating the boundaries in age and gender, as well as between the world of art and society life.

Echoing his early concerns with aging in *Jean Santeuil* and his predilections for the old figures in Rembrandt as previously mentioned, Proust as a young author already engages himself in the challenge against the perception of his own age. Proust wrote two articles on art exhibitions for the journal *Le Mensuel*, 'Galerie George Petit: Exposition internationale de peinture' (hereafter 'George Petit') and 'Impressions des salons' (hereafter 'Impressions'), published respectively in December 1890 and in May 1891. Interestingly, these two commentaries without much of a time gap demonstrate almost contrasting art history views concerning two groups of artists, as Proust illustrates in 'Impressions':

> Nous avons, cette année encore, deux clans de peintres qui se font la guerre: ceux des Champs-Élysées, ceux du Champ de Mars. Les uns tiennent pour la tradition, ils sont l'École; les autres se proclament la jeunesse et la liberté.

(*MR.*, p. 119)

In 'George Petit', Proust clearly underlines the necessity for traditional training for artists and encourages young artists to 'résister au courant',[147] whereas in 'Impressions', he states that 'le Champ de Mars a mieux réussi dans ses recherches'. Different pseudonyms used for each article, as well as the tone of a 'vieux sage' in 'George Petit', as pointed out by Jérôme Prieur,[148] might well suggest a taste for '[l]e bal masqué' that acknowledges the coexistence of different age identities of the author with a stylistic combination of artificiality and sincerity.[149]

Blanche, who painted the portrait of Proust, quoting Jacques Rivière, comments in his *Mes modèles* on the fluidity of age exhibited by the writer at the age of twenty:

> Des façons d'être si nombreuses et contradictoires, qu'on ne sait plus, en les lisant, son âge précis; dans les premiers, est-il enfant ou adolescent? A vingt ans il m'apparaissait doué de cette ambiguïté […] 'Car si quelque chose peut bien caractériser Proust au principe, c'est l'épithète, chère à Freud, de polymorphe'.[150]

The polymorphous nature of age in Proust is also something that Anatole France underlines in his preface for *Les Plaisirs et les jours*:

> Sans doute il est jeune. Il est jeune de la jeunesse de l'auteur. Mais il est vieux de la vieillesse du monde. (*JS*, p. 3)

In this way, the fluid identity as concerns age in the young Proust's work reveals not merely the complexity of his own experience of growth and maturity, but also, even

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[147] *MR*, p. 94.

[148] Ibid., p. 49.

[149] Ibid., p. 48.

[150] Jacques-Émile Blanche, *Mes modèles*, p. 106.

more significantly, an intention of the self to establish a connection with the world. According to Merleau-Ponty, what renders possible the perception of a memory that precedes the existence of self, even the existence of human beings, consists in the fact that

> [n]on pas que le monde est constitué par la conscience, mais au contraire que la conscience se trouve toujours déjà à l'œuvre dans le monde.[151]

The world is therefore considered not as a subjective creation of the mind, but as its innate character, which does not necessarily correspond to a personal experience of time that follows the chronological sequence of aging. The transcendental nature of the association of the self with the world in Merleau-Ponty insists upon neither the immaturity of youth, nor the crumbling appearance of the aged. The portrait of Proust that Blanche felt disappointed for having too much physical resemblance of the person reveals nevertheless an unfailing youth, as Jean-Yves Tadié comments, analogously with the picture of Dorian Gray.[152]

Similarly, the perception of identity in terms of gender in the young Proust manifests a multiplicity that is difficult to define. In his twenties, in answering a questionnaire 'Marcel Proust par lui-même', a portrait constituted of answers to diverse questions on taste and personality, Proust tellingly employs a chiastic structure in his answers:

> La qualité que je préfère chez un homme. — Des charmes féminins.
> La qualité que je préfère chez une femme. — Des vertus d'homme et la franchise dans la camaraderie (*CSB*, p. 336)

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[151] *PP*, p. 494.

[152] Jean-Yves Tadié, *Marcel Proust* (Paris: Gallimard, 1996), p. 178.

Figure 25

Gustave Moreau, *Le Poète arabe ou le chanteur persan*, 1886, watercolour, private collection.

The apparent predilection in these answers for an androgynous perception of gender could be considered as a prefiguration for the exploration of homosexuality and bisexuality in the *Recherche*, similar to Proust's appreciation expressed in the essay 'Les Éblouissements' of the poet endowed with female attributes in Moreau's *Le Poète arabe ou le chanteur persan* (figure 25) as Yae-Jin Yoo suggests.[153] What Proust underlines in the questionnaire and in 'Éblouissement', however, conveys less a reflection on behaviour in relationships of a certain social group, but more a general consideration of the aesthetics of gender.

[153] Yoo, 'Marcel Proust et Gustave Moreau', p. 214.

In his comments on *Le Poète arabe ou le chanteur persan* in 'Les Éblouissements', Proust associates the idealised notion of the poet with androgynous characteristics that include the irreplaceable 'tendresse des femmes' capable of approaching and perceiving nature. The mysterious and almost religious vision of the poet that Proust derives from Moreau's work, thanks to such a gender multiplicity, contains 'toute l'humanité'.[154]

Not only is the multiplicity of identity manifest in Proust's encompassing of the fluidity of age and gender, it is evident that Proust also intermingles various roles within the domain of art. In 'George Petit', while offering an art critic's perspective through his aesthetic judgements on the art works, Proust also examines the material and the techniques of painting with the prudence of an art historian. He discovers that, in the sketches by M. Desboutin, 'il est très difficile à présent de distinguer les pastels de la peinture', because the new trend in painting is 'mate and sincère', which is conducted through '[enduire] les toiles' and '[peindre] avec de la cire'.[155] Indeed, in Charles Moreau-Vauthier's *Technique of Painting* prefaced by Étienne Dinet, the classic formula of the eighteenth century in pastel painting is highlighted as 'the most rational', in which the pastel is thinly rubbed onto the canvas.[156] The new process that utilizes wax in encaustic painting, as explained in this work, was formulated by Mr. Cros and Henry in 1884, which 'gives transparence and

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[154] *CSB*, p. 534.

[155] *MR*, p. 96.

[156] Charles Moreau-Vauthier, *The Technique of Painting, with a Preface by Étienne Dinet* (London: W. Heinemann, 1912), p. 85.

relief' to the painting, a trait spotted constantly by Proust in his previous assessments of Dinet's works.[157] Apart from playing the role of an art historian, Proust adds comments on the presentation of art works in 'Impressions', providing a constructive suggestion 'ne mettez pas [...] des verres sur votre peinture mate', considering the undermining effect of luminous glass to the dull texture that the works seek to foreground.[158] Also through discerning a flaw in the arrangement of Puvis de Chavannes's painting on a red background, which according to him disturbs the gentle harmony of the ethereal work, Proust demonstrates a technical concern that would be worthy of a museum curator.[159] These brief attempts by the young Proust at different roles including art critic, art historian, and curator, reveal a complexity of vision which might mirror his eulogising comments on the young painters at the salon at Champs de Mars, 'ce sont des chercheurs sincères, et singulièrement heureux',[160] as well as his recognition of Robert de Montesquiou's dual personality as a critic and an artist in 'M. de Montesquiou, historien et poète'.[161]

Also, in the mutual admiration between Proust and Jacques-Émile Blanche, who was also a writer, the perception of the multi-facetted identity of Proust unfolds along the constant crossings-over between the domains of literature and painting. According to Blanche, Proust's early practice of literature that imitates a diverse range of classical authors is no different from an apprentice painter's exercise:

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[157] Ibid., p. 108.

[158] *MR*, p. 96.

[159] Ibid., p. 120.

[160] Ibid., p. 122.

[161] *CSB*, p. 411-12.

> Marcel Proust a fondé sur ses immenses lectures classiques, retenues et employées dans ses 'pastiches' — ce que serait, pour les élèves-peintres, la copie d'après les maîtres. (Blanche, *Mes modèles*, p. 118)

Such a concordance between different arts is equally manifest in Blanche's own perception:

> Mes articles, mes études, mes livres ne sont, à la façon de mes portraits peints, que les paragraphes ou les pages d'une petite histoire de mon temps.[162]

The recognition of painting and literature as equal practices serves as one of the fundamental reasons for the two artists' mutual appreciation, which inspires a creative practice on both parts with an inter-disciplinary aspiration. In this light, the portrait Blanche painted for Proust involves a much more complex dialogue than simply that of a flattering gift from a friend.

Two seemingly incompatible yet constantly interlaced spheres, of artistic solitude and of social interaction, define another dimension of the notion of identity in the young Proust, which is interestingly revealed in the mutual perception with Blanche. Briefly mentioning Blanche in his two early essays on exhibitions of young painters, Proust undeniably considers the painter first as one of the 'simples portraitistes de la société mondaine' as Yoshikawa points out.[163] Such an almost reproaching comment is probably derived from the mental debates on one of the principle concerns of the young Proust on art and life, represented by his reflections on the much admired Moreau, who retreated from social life to 's'enfermer chez lui

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[162] Jacques-Émile Blanche, *Dates* (Paris: Emile-Paul, 1921), p. iv.

[163] Yoshikawa, *Proust et l'art pictural*, p. 221.

pour se consacrer à la création'.[164] Proust's celebration of Moreau's preference for the 'moi intérieur'[165] manifest in being 'une espèce d'exil souvent volontaire',[166] however, does not impede him from adoring the portrait Blanche painted for him (figure 26), as although Blanche judged the work to be a failure, Proust proudly embraced its charm and hung it in his salon until the end of his life.[167] In *Jean Santeuil*, Proust fictionalises this portrait as a work of 'un peintre mondain'—La Grandara:

> Cette année-là La Grandara exposa au Champ-de-Mars un portrait de Jean Santeuil. Ses anciens camarades d'Henri-IV n'auraient certainement pas reconnu l'écolier désordonné, toujours mal mis, dépeigné, couvert de taches, l'attitude fiévreuse ou abattue, le geste plus expressif que noble, le regard exalté s'il était seul, timide et honteux s'il était devant un monde, toujours pâle, les yeux tirés, cernés par l'agitation, l'insomnie ou la fièvre, le nez trop fort dans les joues creuses avec de grands yeux pensants qui versaient seuls quelque beauté, avec leur lumière et leur tourment, sur cette figure irrégulière et maladive, dans le brillant jeune homme qui semblait encore poser devant tout Paris, sans timidité comme sans bravade, le regardant de ses beaux yeux plus capables de contenir une pensée qu'en ayant pour le moment aucune, d'un rose blanc qui rougissait à peine aux oreilles que venaient caresser les dernières boucles d'une chevelure noire et douce, brillante et coulante, s'échappant en ondes comme au sortir de l'eau. Une rose coupée au coin de son veston de chevrote vert, une cravate d'une légère étoffe indienne qui imitait les ocellées du paon, venaient témoigner à la vérité de sa mine lumineuse et fraîche comme un matin de printemps, de sa beauté non pas pensante mais peut-être doucement pensive, de la délicatesse heureuse de sa vie. (*JS*, p. 675)

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[164] Yoo, 'Marcel Proust et Gustave Moreau', p. 212.

[165] *CSB*, p. 221-22.

[166] Ibid., p. 672.

[167] Roberts, *Jacques-Émile Blanche*, p. 78.

Figure 26

Jacques-Émile Blanche, *Marcel Proust*, 1892, canvas, 87 x 74 cm, Musée d'Orsay, Paris.

In the two juxtaposed parts of description, Proust opposes the brilliant young man in the portrait against the image of a sickly nervous and untidy student according to the impressions of Jean's old schoolmates, underlining on the one hand the flattering nature of the portrait, and seeking on the other hand to compensate the idealised side represented in Blanche's work with words to complete a portrait of himself with two co-existing identities. Interestingly, in Blanche's description of Proust in *Mes Modèles*, the painter demonstrates a similar effort. Despite the 'dandysme vestimentaire', Blanche observes in the young Proust many revealing details that correspond more closely to Proust's description of the disordered pupil, including his

'doigts pleins d'encre', 'ses "cols cassés"', and his 'cravates vert d'eau nouées au hasard, des pantalons tirebouchonnants, la redingote flottante'.[168] These observations of Proust along with his immense admiration for Proust's work, reflect the sincere gaze of a painter that transcends the surface of mondanité, seeking to capture as Georges-Paul Collet suggests, '"l'œil à facettes" de Marcel, capable de saisir à la fois tous les aspects du monde'.[169] And in Proust's ekphrasis of the portrait in *Jean Santeuil*, the appreciation of the nobility portrayed by the artist, particularly of the eyes capable of thoughts yet calmly devoid of specific preoccupation in the moment, almost parallels the quality of the neither purely spiritual nor purely physical Van Dyck temperament that impassioned the young Proust. The flattering image of the portrait, is therefore deemed not as an untruthful glorification, but rather as a dimension precisely aspired to by Proust. In this way, the contrast between the sitter and the idealised representation is accepted both by Proust and by Blanche.

By replacing 'Blanche' with 'Gandara' as the portrait painter in *Jean Santeuil*, Proust modestly conceals a direct association with his real-life experience, and at the same time situates Blanche alongside with Gandara among the painters of 'mondain' scenes and portraits that Proust also mentions in his 'George Petit' and 'Impressions'. One typical portrait by painters of 'mondain' scenes such as Henri Lucien Doucet, Blanche, and most notably Boldini, was the unneglectable portrait of

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[168] Blanche, *Mes modèles*, p. 106-7.

[169] Georges-Paul Collet, *Jacques-Émile Blanche: le peintre-écrivain: biographie* (Paris: Bartillat, 2006), p. 60.

Robert de Montesquiou, mentor and an idealised figure for the young Proust. Apart from the intellectual vigour and elegance in manner, the young Proust emphasises in 'Robert de Montesquiou' as he does for Alphonse Daudet, as previously mentioned, his fascination for 'la beauté parfaite, la noblesse pensive de sa figure' and 'cette tête aux cheveux légèrement bouclés comme celles des statues grecques', in the photo of Montesquiou.[170] The pensive quality, the nobility and the elegance of the hair resonate with Proust's ekphrasis of his own portrait, revealing perhaps an aspiration to emulate the image of an idol, as well as a narcissistic gaze of 'moi-même vu du dehors' in Merleau-Ponty's terms.[171]

It is known that later in the *Recherche*, Proust fiercely criticises the insincerity of idolatry represented among others in the character Charlus, who was inspired by Montesquiou.[172] However, before such an unreserved critique, the young Proust's attitude experienced a period of ambivalence. His 'mi-admiratif, mi-critique' perception of Montesquiou is manifest in the essays 'Robert de Montesquiou à Versailles', 'M. de Montesquiou, historien et poète', and 'Un professeur de beauté',[173] through which Proust seeks to liberate the critic and art collector from the somewhat derogative image of a Decadent, precisely because Proust observes in Montesquiou a multiplicity of identities he excellently combines, notably that of a poet of the avant-garde and of the classical tradition, reconciling the debate

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[170] *CSB*, p. 409.

[171] *VI*, p. 177.

[172] Schmid, *Proust dans la Décadence*, p. 104.

[173] Ibid., p. 37.

between traditionalists and modernists in French literature,[174] parallel to the competition in the fine arts mentioned in 'George Petit' and 'Impressions'.

The complexity in Proust's perception of Montesquiou in a way reflects a vision of himself trying on multi-facetted roles in the formative years of his youth. Although there is always an inclination for purity of thought as demonstrated in his emphasis on the 'volonté' of thinking in Montequiou and the admiration for the reclusive Moreau,[175] the involvement with the so-called 'mondain' painters such as Blanche, reveals an aesthetic substantially rooted in life. Blanche, who had admired Proust's observing eye since his youth,[176] admits his own 'franchise' in *Dates*: 'je ne suis qu'un portraitiste qui raconte ce qu'il voit, de son mieux'.[177] In 'La Méthode de Sainte-Beuve', Proust disfavours the approach of looking into the private life of artists to understand their works. And Blanche, though well-known for depicting social figures, similarly sought to maintain the subtle balance between life and art, discerning in Proust the very art of turning real life models into works not of realistic resemblance but with elements translated by a particular vision, which likens the transformative ability of a painter's brush:

> Ce qui constitue un des caractères de votre génie et, peut-être, avec votre langue, votre principale originalité, — c'est cette dualité de peintre et de modèle. (Blanche, *Dates*, p. xiv)

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[174] Ibid., p. 46.

[175] *CSB*, p. 407.

[176] Blanche, *Mes modèles*, p. 96.

[177] Blanche, *Dates*, p. iv.

The comprehending gaze towards the model together with the particular vision of a painter, originates precisely from the fluid identities of the young Proust who records experience and models in society life, 'lives' in different roles with a self-reflecting gaze while maintaining an artistic originality. And it is this capacity for self-observation as well as for observation of others that allows Proust to become, as Blanche comments, 'un "portraitiste" comme il n'en sera jamais parmi les peintres', who translates real life experiences into a fictional world of magnificent portraits in the *Recherche*.[178]

Conclusion

In his early engagement with human portraiture, the young Proust's admiration for Rembrandt demonstrates an evident inclination towards the realm of the spiritual where he situates the Dutch master within the Cartesian dichotomy. However, his reading of Rembrandt's works in 'Chardin et Rembrandt', 'Rembrandt', and his Rembrandtesque descriptions of people in *Jean Santeuil* nevertheless reveal a vision that interrogates and breaches this dichotomy. The elevation of the aged in Proust and Rembrandt's works, raising the significance of death and eternity to an almost religious height, is centred upon the aesthetics of the paradoxical relationship between the aged body and the soul, which Proust seeks to define not through a symbolic understanding, but rather from a phenomenological point of view that

[178] Ibid., p. xiv.

foregrounds the role of the body in relating the chiasma between the subject and the world. In portrait painting, Proust's vision resonates with that of Rembrandt by emphasising precisely the in-between phenomenal aspects, including the subtle gestures and the minimal postures that reflect a movement of 'rayonnement' in Merleau-Ponty's terms, the act of breathing that indicates a blurring effect of the inside and the outside, and the gaze in the painting that accentuates the notion of the invisible and disturbs the fixed identification of subject and object.[179]

Further on, in 'La Personne d'Alphonse Daudet: œuvre d'art', Proust seeks to delineate the person of Alphonse Daudet from all platonic notions of thoughts and images while not entirely relying on purely physical attributes, and he finds a perfect definition of such a vision in Van Dyck, in whose works the human figures' particular temperament replaces their physiognomy.[180] The quality of elegance Proust appreciates in Van Dyck reveals a phenomenological perception of the individual that underlines the Merleau-Pontian 'atmosphère', which also explains Proust's emphasis on the unvarying manner of gesture belonging to a family in *Jean Santeuil*.[181] And such a perception of manner, particularly in artists, sheds light on his understanding of identity as vision and style and illustrates his intimate affection for Van Dyck's works.

It is known that in the *Recherche*, the rich and profound portrayal of human figures reaches an unsurpassable state, significantly illustrating the density of

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[179] *ŒE*, p. 77.

[180] *CSB*, pp. 399-402.

[181] *PP*, p. 370.

phenomenality, with the earlier platonic obsession of spiritual purity no longer visible. Such a tendency to 'all[er] au plus épais des forces profondes' in portrait is already discernible in the young Proust from the hints of the Merleau-Pontian bodily-based perception of people in his vision closely associated with Rembrandt and Van Dyck.[182] It also manifests in the perception of a 'polymorphe' self in his early practice, revealed in his writings for *Le Mensuel*, his reception of the portrait by Blanche, and his ambivalent opinions towards Montesquiou in various essays dedicated to the mentor.[183] The multiplicity of identities adopted by the young Proust as regards age, gender, artistic profession, and social persona, reflects a vision of portrait painting not only nourished by an intent observation, but also through living behind the different masks that prepares him well for the masterful portraits to come in the *Recherche*.

[182] Aubert, *Proust: La Traduction du sensible*, p. 2.

[183] Blanche, *Mes modèle*, p. 106.

Conclusion

The broad engagement of Proust's early writings with the visual arts, covering genre paintings and still lives, landscapes of the botanical world, seascapes, and portraits, reveals a vision of the young Proust in both unique and converging ways. From the immediate predilection for the comfort and peace in genre paintings and still lives, seen in elaborate comments and 'word paintings' that evoke the works of Rembrandt, Vermeer, and Chardin, to an Edenic aspiration to the meditative experiences in gardens and wild nature that resonates with the aesthetics of Ruskin, Monet, Madeleine Lemaire, and the Pre-Raphaelites, not to forget the less explicit but all the more revealing similarities in the depiction of water and air with the manners of Turner, Monet, and Whistler, nor Proust's emerging interest and commencing contemplations of human figures in the reading and the ekphrastic or emulative depictions of the portrait paintings of Rembrandt, Van Dyck, and Blanche, the investigation into four genres of painting in this thesis delineates the precious apprenticeship of vision in the young Proust that will be fully borne out in the *Recherche*.

From the perspective of aesthetics with a particular emphasis on the visual arts, the thesis enquired into the young Proust's embrace of the significance of painting for his own developing vision. He not only uses works of art as guidance for his vision, stating 'cela est beau comme un Chardin'[1] and exalting human figures as

[1] *CSB*, p. 374.

'œuvre[s] d'art',[2] but also shows an intimate attachment to the actual physical quality of paintings and specific manners of gesture and techniques of painters, such as the oiliness and dryness of paint in Rembrandt, Turner, and Whistler, the joy of mixing colours in Fantin-Latour, and the particular shapes of brushstrokes in Monet. In recognising such an enthusiasm, the thesis looks further into Proust's 'word paintings' through a Merleau-Pontian lens, focusing on the connection between literature and painting in the commonalities of perception, namely, how Proust's writings resonate with the works of painters in their way of perceiving phenomenological aspects: colour and light, space, and time.

In the domain of colour and light, the young Proust first underlines the phenomenon of colour perceived as a 'dimension', to use Merleau-Ponty's terms, whether through foregrounding the solid existence of reflections in the chiaroscuro of Rembrandt's genre paintings, or through immersing himself in the single colour of hydrangeas and depicting detached flowers as autonomous entities of colour in a Pre-Raphaelite manner, or through presenting a tableau of water and air composed principally of colours in words that resembles the poetic atmosphere of Turner, Whistler, and Monet. And further accentuating the phenomenality of colour as opposed to the property of an object, Proust constantly brings forth a 'champ visuel' where the relationship between two colours is based on the dynamics of their interaction instead of their signifying function. Such an attention to colour is developed into a close engagement with the perception of multiple colours, most

[2] Ibid., p. 399.

evidently seen in his predilections for the subtleness and sense of harmony reflected for instance in the transparency of shadow in Rembrandt and Vermeer, the multiple-colour effect that resembles Impressionist paintings in the depiction of gardens, as well as the preference for the indistinctness of shape due to the merging of colours that echoes the harmonious tonality that approaches the notion of music in Monet and Whistler's seascapes.

In perceiving space, Proust intentionally highlights the sense of structure presented in a two-dimensional painting such as in the works of Chardin and Corot, identifying indications of a spatial structure, including the open and protruding arrangement of space in genre scenes, the awareness of spatial division in the portrayal of wood and forest, and the composition of seascapes that exhibits the all-encompassing immensity of the sublime. At the same time, he demonstrates an inclination towards an imperfect representation of space such as the blocked view in seascapes, the indefinability of an isolated space in the wilderness, and the marginal corner of a garden, while assuming a complete perception of the larger spatial context, which points to a fully experienced spatial perception. Such a perception, in Merleau-Ponty's terms, refers to a spatial consciousness built upon the lived structure relying on a body that moves and performs gestures in situations, which is seen in Proust's depictions of the embodied space in genre scenes, gardens and flowers, as well as the engulfing sea in storms.

Perceiving time remains the most intricate phenomenological endeavour in the young Proust. Seeking to fathom the extremes of temporal perception, Proust excels in both telescopic and microscopic observations. He discerns from a distance

in time the aesthetic of repetition in everyday affairs in the still lives of Chardin, the seasonal cycles in the depiction of gardens and the habitual recurring of familial manners in human portraits, and his perception extends into an awareness of time on an almost astrological scale that verges on breaking the four-dimensional limit, juxtaposing different moments in depicting a changing garden that resembles the manner of Monet, and envisioning the animalistic or inorganic perception of time in an immensity that erases human traces in the style of Whistler. When returning to subjective impressions of time on a personal scale, Proust nevertheless inclines towards the quality of a memory of 'premières émotions' that resembles the misty atmosphere of garden depictions in Monet,[3] and a state of the apocalyptic murkiness in Turner's seascapes that prefigures a rebirth of vision, approximating to the Merleau-Pontian affinity for the primordial. In a closer examination of the passing of time, Proust observes the undetachable recent past and the impending future from the present moment of the tableau of a feast by Chardin, the enrapturing view of a sea storm not yet fully manifest, the process of aging in old people, aligning the sense of becoming foregrounded by Merleau-Ponty with a temporal perception opposed to the objectified division and localisation of time. Furthermore, a subtler depiction of time in Proust interrogates the intensely engaged moment of the present, such as the pure existence of 'une chose qui est' that resonates with the semi-absent-minded states depicted in the genre scenes of

[3] *JS*, p. 773.

Vermeer and Chardin,[4] the state of the protagonist Jean who reads while contemplating plants in the woods, and the meditation of the thinking figures in Rembrandt, where the subject, as Merleau-Ponty suggests with regard to temporal perception, becomes time itself.

The perception of light and colour, space, and time, however, does not pertain to the act of perceiving in the sense of objective thoughts, for there is no clear division between the perceiving subject and an object, as Merleau-Ponty points out. Instead of a passive perception, the young Proust's engagement with all four genres of painting, especially portraits, is realised in a vision where the subject is fully embedded in the world, or rather, where the notion of the subject dissolves. This is first manifest in Proust's emphasis on the integrality of perception, such as the 'amitié' of colours within a tonal range,[5] the wholeness of space in viewing a valley, the merging experience in a storm that resembles a Turner, and various experiences of synesthesia. The inclination towards the integration of sensory elements, as Merleau-Ponty analyses, approaches the primordial state where the body exerts a fundamental role. Being both a sensing and sensed entity, the body, whose boundary between the inside and the outside is breached, acts as an element to perceive the world which is at the same time one with it. Similarly, the embodied vision of Proust, vividly manifest through various personified perceptions in the domestic environment, in identifying the particularity of the plants in gardens and

[4] Ibid., p. 320.

[5] Ibid., p. 380.

forests, and in recognising the water of a sea, embraces the colour and light, space, time, and human figures through ways of living, dwelling, and participating. Such an artistic vision, in Merleau-Ponty's terms, is metaphorically accomplished in the bodily movements of dance, of being born into, and of breathing in the world.

From the viewpoint of Comparative Literature, this thesis has foregrounded the mutual inclination of vision between the author Proust and a number of visual artists for whom he has a particular affinity. Attentive to the mutual illumination that is at the heart of the comparative methodology, this thesis therefore not only offers a fresh interpretation of Proust as related to visual arts, but also offers new interpretations of art works read through the prism of the Proustian vision, offering a possibility in art criticism that substantially interrogates literature with an outlook of the internal dynamics between the two media. Setting out from the foundations of biographical research, a similar intermedial aesthetics is identified in Proust and the artists who, like him, cross-over between different art forms, such as Ruskin as 'un peintre qui écrit', Turner who names himself an 'author' in the title of one of his works, and Blanche who equates his writings with his portraits.[6] Our comparison of text and image relations in detailed examinations of the phenomenological commonalities between the writer and the visual artists helps us to better understand their shared intermedial approach.

Blanche in his 'Réponse à la préface de Marcel Proust au De David à Degas' in *Dates*, ardently states that

> Herr Einstein, déjà si fameux avant la guerre par son principe de la relativité,

[6] Tsumori, *Proust et le paysage*, p. 104.

> nous ferait croire aujourd'hui que Newton s'est trompé. Vous saurez plus tard, vous, Marcel Proust, si Einstein est aussi grand que vous…
> Car vous nous avez déjà fait connaître une dimension nouvelle. (Blanche, *Dates*, p. xliii)

Such a new dimension disclosed in the *Recherche*, would not be in the least inappropriate to describe the Proustian vision that disturbs the traditional way of seeing, which already emerges beautifully in his early writings. The phenomenological method drawing on Merleau-Ponty that we have employed in this thesis helps us grasp precisely such a revolutionary vision. The particularity of the aesthetics, perception, and vision in the young Proust we have identified points towards the *Recherche* where it will be fully borne out, for, as Proust states in *Le Temps retrouvé*,

> Le style, pour l'écrivain aussi bien que pour le peintre, est une question non de technique, mais de vision. Il est la révélation, qui serait impossible par des moyens directs et conscients, de la différence qualitative qu'il y a dans la façon dont nous apparaît le monde, différence qui, s'il n'y avait pas l'art, resterait le secret.[7]

[7] *RTP*, IV (1989), p. 474.

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